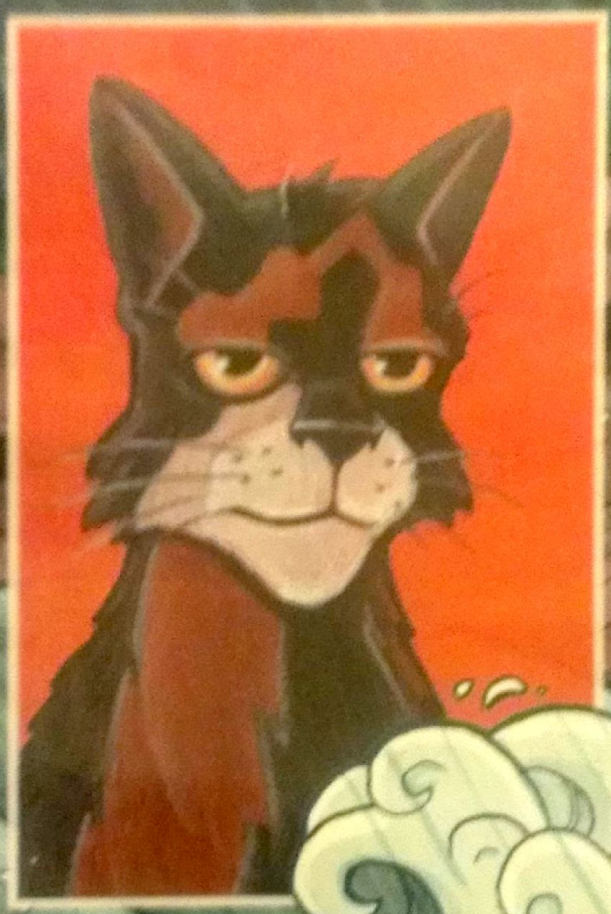
The #1 national bestselling series, now in manga!

WARRIORS

SKYCLAN & THE STRANGER



BEYOND THE CODE

ERIN HUNTER

2

Dear readers,

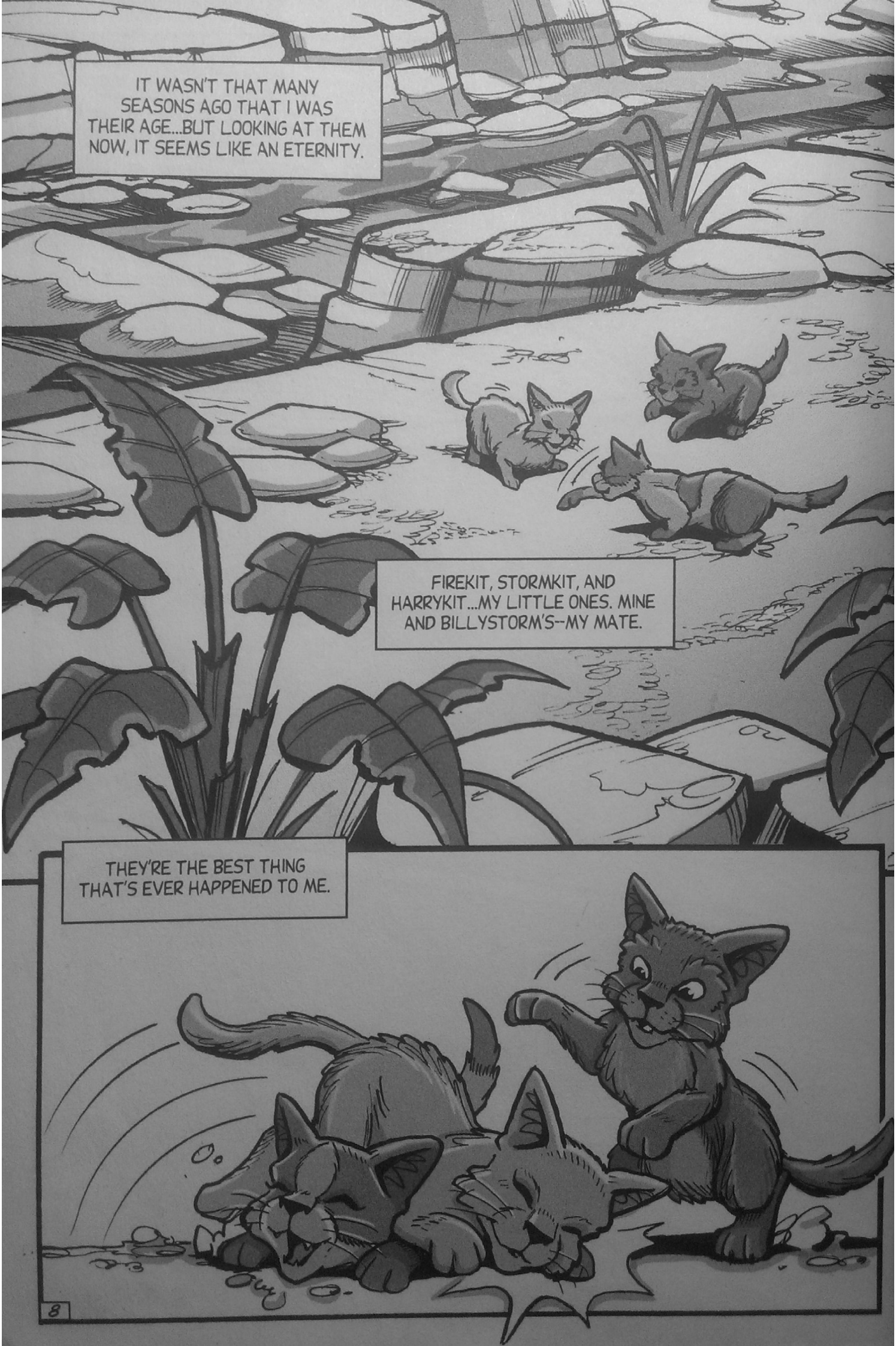
Welcome to the second part of the SkyClan manga trilogy. Leafstar has kits! I have a weakness for baby animals of any kind, but in manga they are a particular treat because I get to see my characters leaping around in the illustrations. If you've read *Bluestar's Prophecy*, you'll know that poor Bluefur felt as if she was forced to choose between her kits and her career when she was on the brink of becoming ThunderClan's deputy. But here in SkyClan, there is nothing to stop Leafstar from becoming a mother. She has a kind mate, a skilled medicine cat, and supportive senior warriors—even Sharpclaw, whose tongue can be as barbed as his talons!

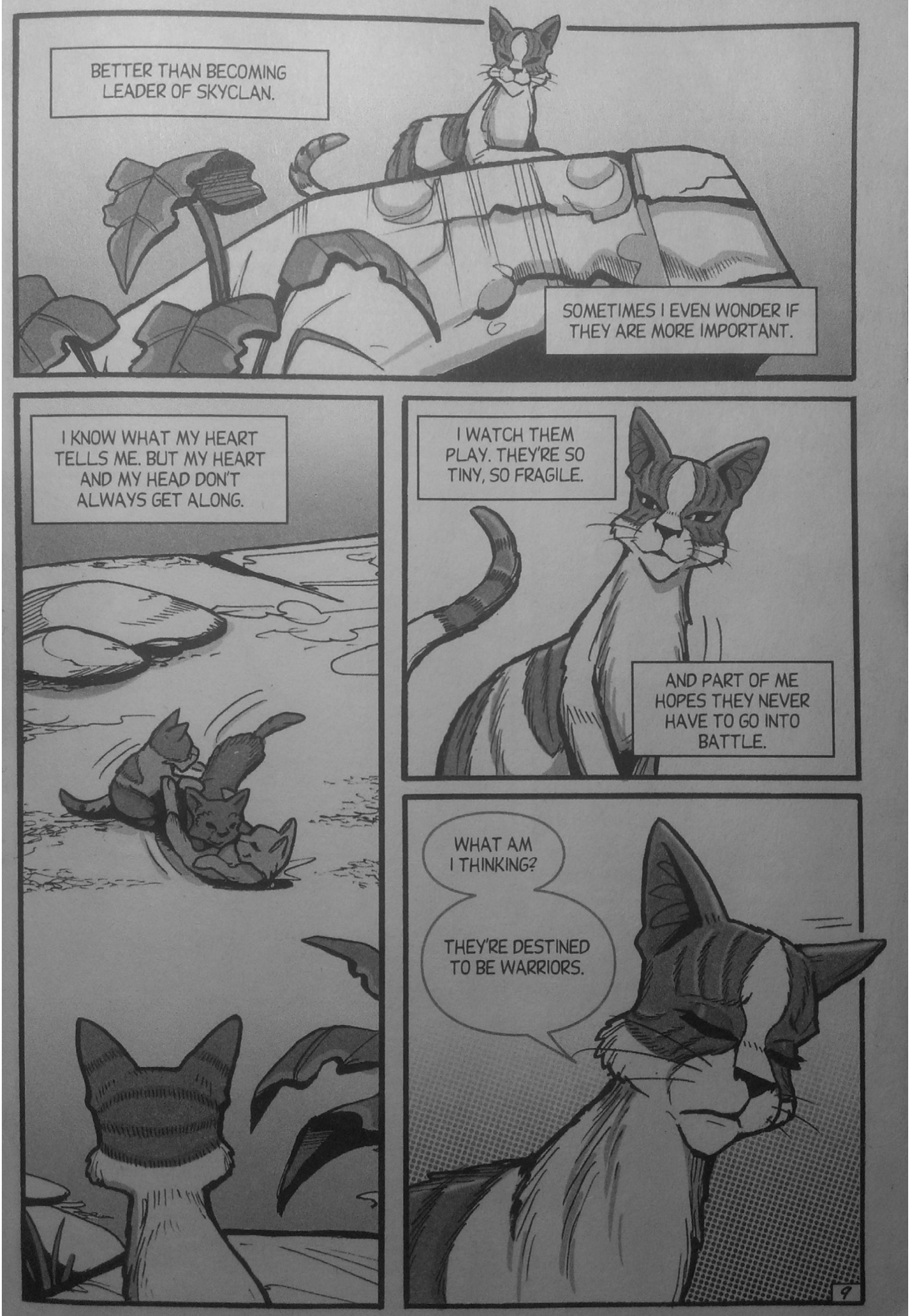
Of course, raising three lively kits while leading a Clan is never going to be easy. Almost as soon as this story begins, Leafstar is torn between tending to her son's scratched nose and dealing with a problem reported by a hunting patrol. Later, her loyalties are divided even more dramatically in the thick of a battle, when she has to balance the safety of her kits with fighting alongside her Clanmates. I wanted to show that Leafstar can never stop being a mother, which means that her role as the leader of SkyClan is going to be even more difficult than before. But Leafstar has a huge heart and a great deal of courage, so I hope this is one more challenge that she relishes.

On the other hand (or paw), we have Sol. Never has a cat been more desperate to become a warrior! In this story we get to travel back to his kithood, to his unhappy mother and neglectful father, where stories of mysterious "Sky Warriors" made young Sol wish he could find his own way to escape his mother's lonely and miserable life. It's not surprising that SkyClan seems to be exactly what he has been looking for. But do all cats *deserve* to be warriors? Is it enough just to want something badly? And what about Leafstar's part in his destiny? She has the power to grant Sol's wish, and she knows how much this means to him. I wonder if you will agree with her decision. . . .

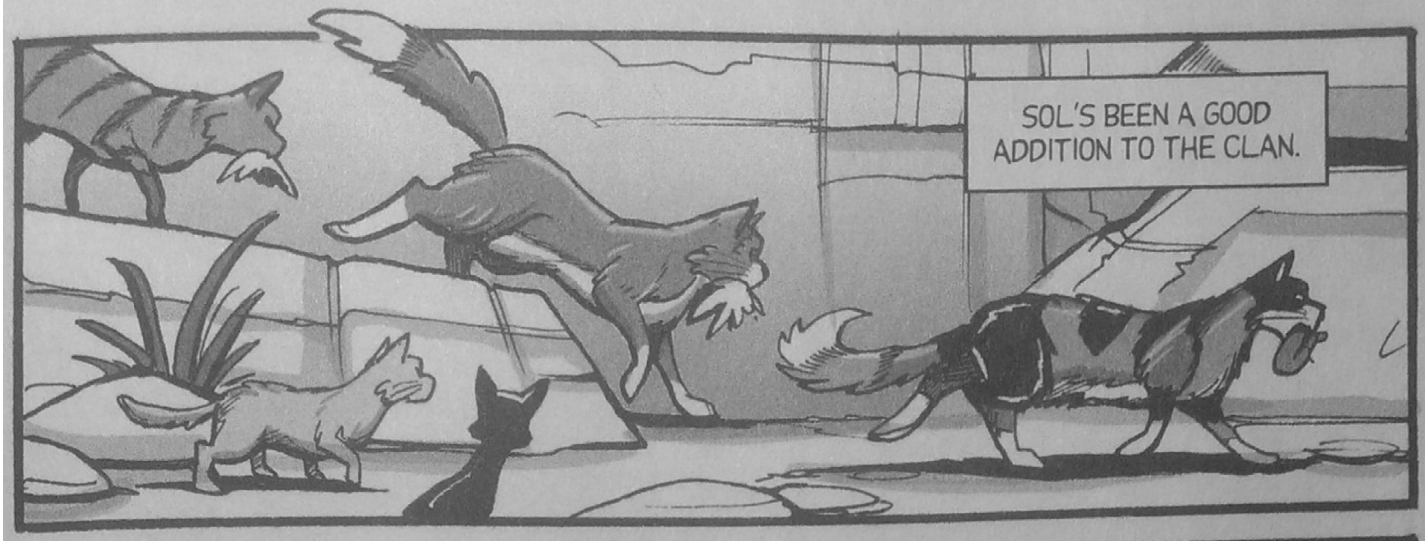
Best wishes always,
Erin Hunter

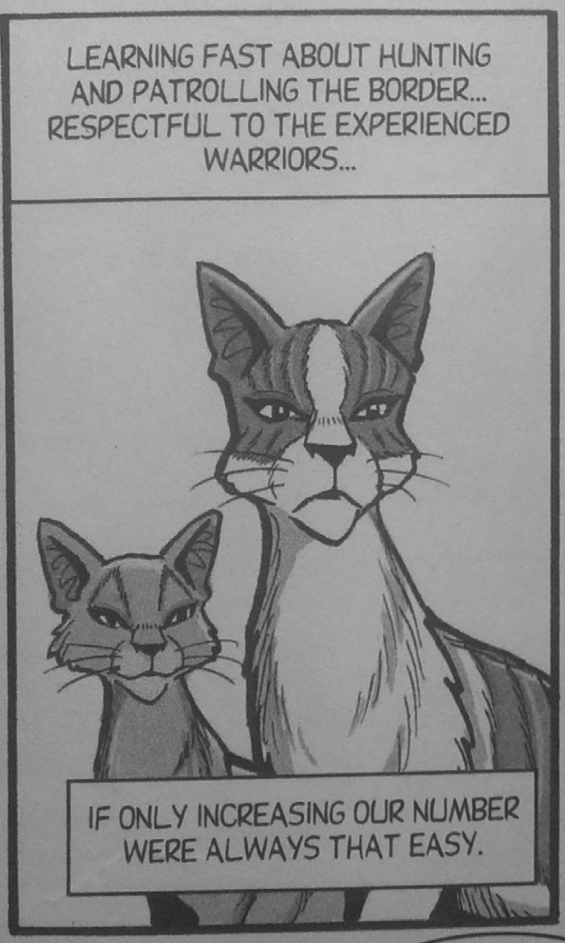
BAM!
POW!
TAKE THAT!
I'LL GET YOU!

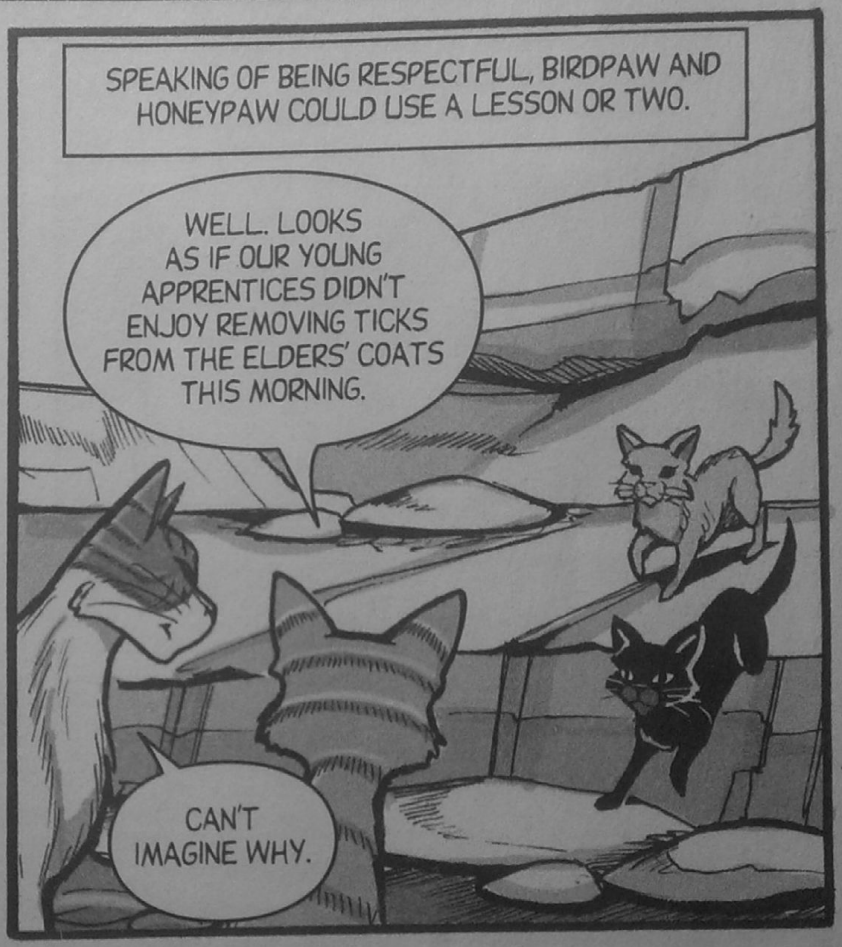

IT WASN'T THAT MANY SEASONS AGO THAT I WAS THEIR AGE...BUT LOOKING AT THEM NOW, IT SEEMS LIKE AN ETERNITY.
FIREKIT, STORMKIT, AND HARRYKIT...MY LITTLE ONES. MINE AND BILLYSTORM'S--MY MATE.
THEY'RE THE BEST THING THAT'S EVER HAPPENED TO ME.
8

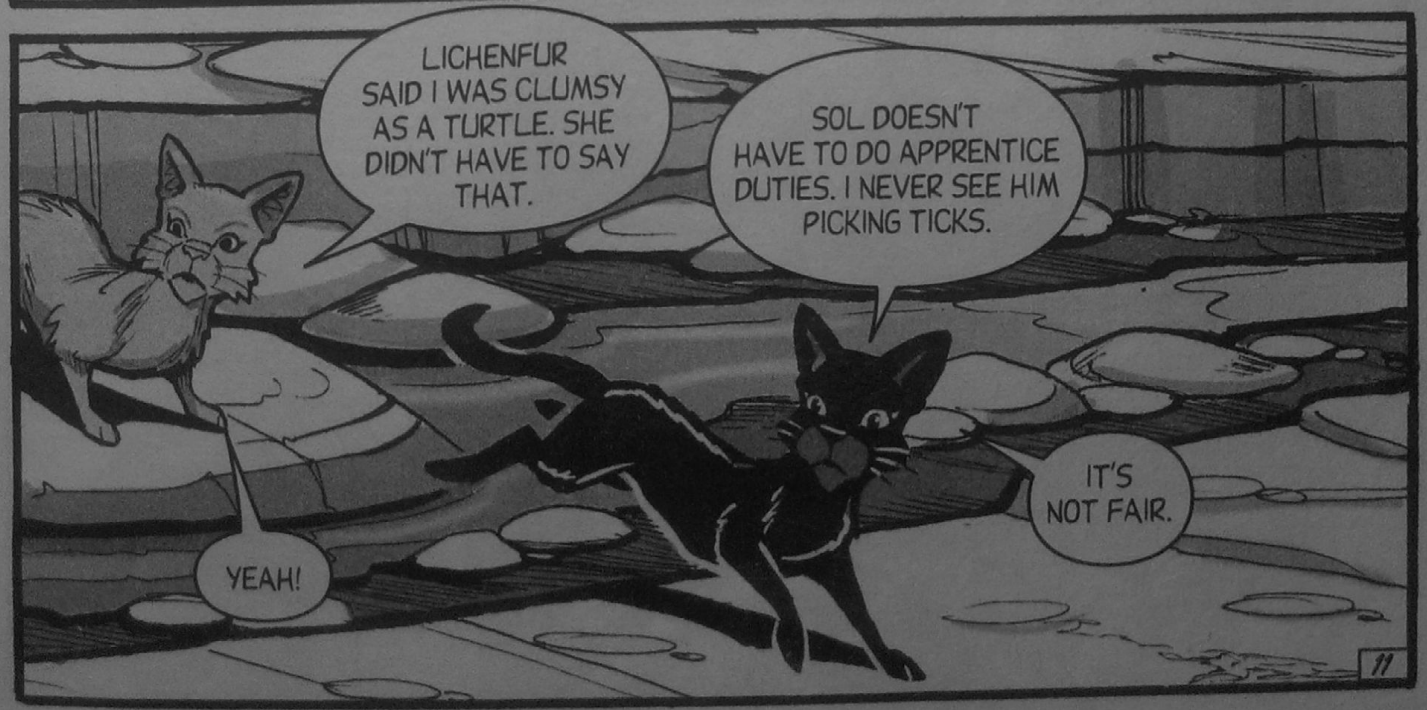

BETTER THAN BECOMING LEADER OF SKYCLAN.
SOMETIMES I EVEN WONDER IF THEY ARE MORE IMPORTANT.
I KNOW WHAT MY HEART TELLS ME. BUT MY HEART AND MY HEAD DON'T ALWAYS GET ALONG.
I WATCH THEM PLAY. THEY'RE SO TINY, SO FRAGILE.
AND PART OF ME HOPES THEY NEVER HAVE TO GO INTO BATTLE.
WHAT AM I THINKING?
THEY'RE DESTINED TO BE WARRIORS.
9

WHAT WAS THAT, LEAFSTAR?
CLOVERTAIL-- YOU SNUCK UP ON ME.
AND IT WAS... NOTHING. JUST TALKING TO MYSELF.
IT'S SO HARD, ISN'T IT, KNOWING THEY WILL GROW UP TO FIGHT AND BE IN DANGER?
BUT WE CAN'T KEEP THEM IN THE NURSERY FOREVER. AND IT'S AN HONOR TO KNOW THEY'LL SERVE THEIR CLAN ONE DAY.
IT IS HARD, YES...BUT YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE.
I'M IN YOUR DEBT, YOU KNOW. YOU'VE BEEN SUCH A BIG HELP SINCE THE KITS WERE BORN.
IT'S MY PLEASURE, OF COURSE. BUT YOU'RE WELCOME.
SPEAKING OF SKYCLAN CATS...
IT SEEMS LIKE SOL IS FITTING IN PRETTY WELL.
SOL. FORMER KITTYPET...LEFT HIS LIFE WITH A TWOLEG BEHIND TO COME AND JOIN OUR CLAN.


SOL'S BEEN A GOOD ADDITION TO THE CLAN.


LEARNING FAST ABOUT HUNTING AND PATROLLING THE BORDER... RESPECTFUL TO THE EXPERIENCED WARRIORS...
IF ONLY INCREASING OUR NUMBER WERE ALWAYS THAT EASY.

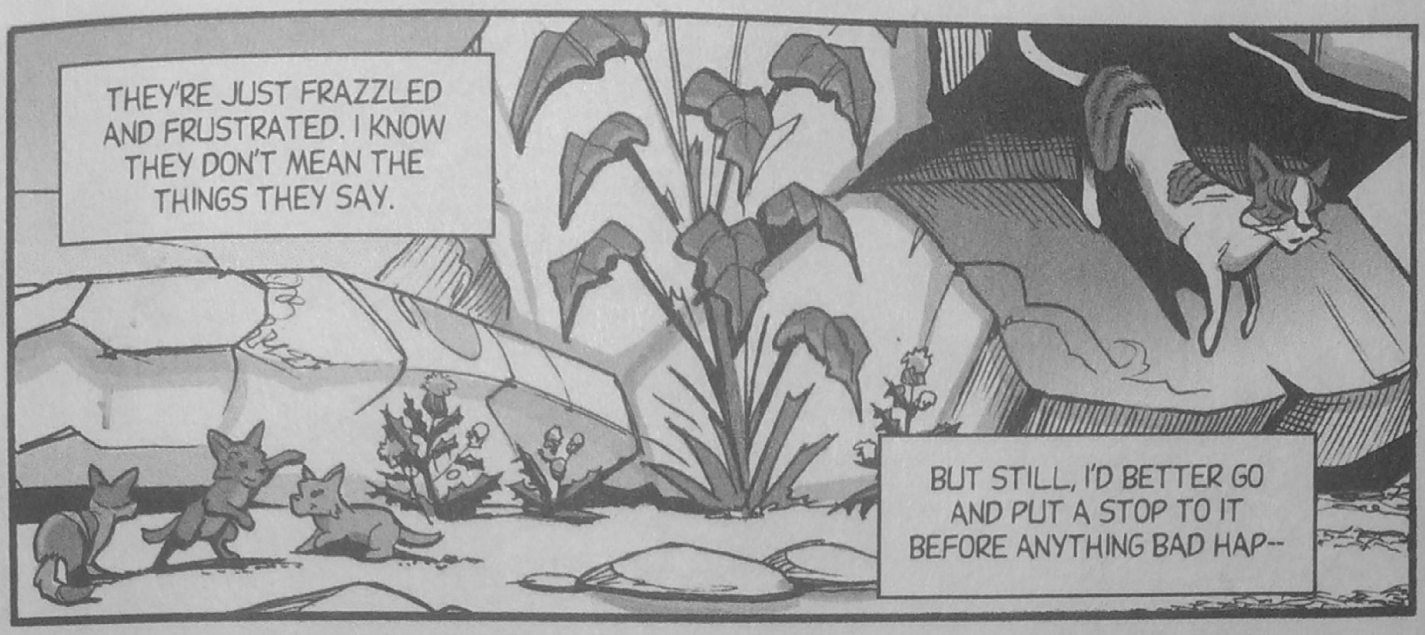

SPEAKING OF BEING RESPECTFUL, BIRDPAW AND HONEYPAW COULD USE A LESSON OR TWO.
WELL. LOOKS AS IF OUR YOUNG APPRENTICES DIDN'T ENJOY REMOVING TICKS FROM THE ELDERS' COATS THIS MORNING.
CAN'T IMAGINE WHY.

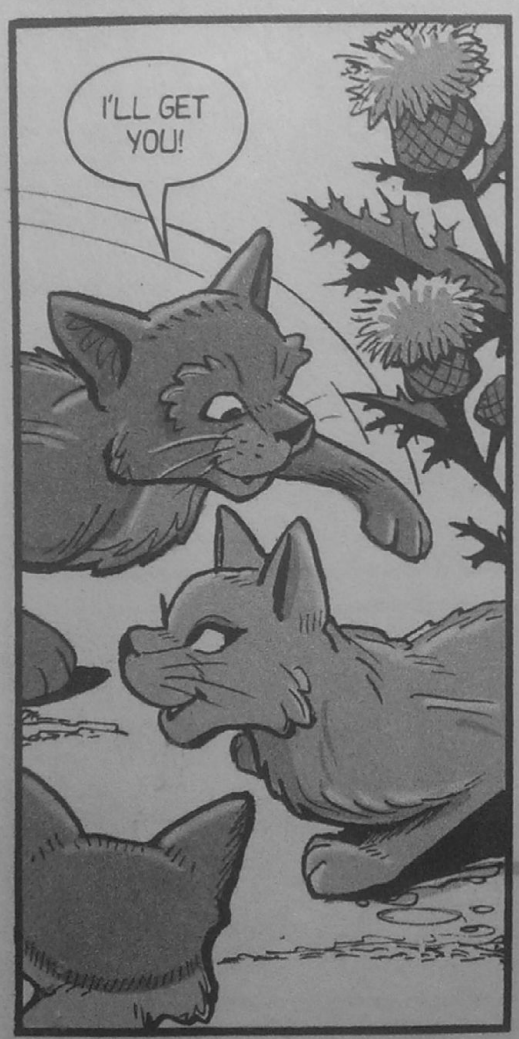

LICHENFUR SAID I WAS CLUMSY AS A TURTLE. SHE DIDN'T HAVE TO SAY THAT.
SOL DOESN'T HAVE TO DO APPRENTICE DUTIES. I NEVER SEE HIM PICKING TICKS.
YEAH!
IT'S NOT FAIR.

YOU BOTH KNOW SOL ISN'T EXACTLY AN APPRENTICE.
HE MAY HAVE JOINED SKYCLAN RECENTLY, BUT HE'S FULL-GROWN AND HAS LOTS OF EXPERIENCE.
EVEN IF HE HASN'T DONE WARRIOR TRAINING.
THEN HE SHOULD HAVE A WARRIOR NAME.
DON'T WORRY, HONEYPAW. HE WILL SOON.
IT'S BEEN HOT LATELY. VERY HOT. I DON'T KNOW THAT I CAN REMEMBER THE LAST TIME IT FELT LIKE THIS, FOR THIS LONG.
IT'S UNCOMFORTABLE, THAT'S CERTAIN, BUT THE EFFECTS GO BEYOND THAT.
12

THANKS TO THE HEAT, THE FRESH-KILL IS SCARCE...
...BECAUSE ALL THE PREY SEEMS TO BE SPENDING DAYTIME IN BURROWS OR NESTS TO AVOID THE SUN.
THIS GIVES RISE TO A PRICKLY SITUATION WITH OUR DAYLIGHT-WARRIORS...
...CATS WHO HUNT WITH US DURING THE DAY, BUT GO TO THEIR TWOLEG HOMES AT NIGHT.
THEIR SOURCES OF FOOD ARE GUARANTEED...AND IT LOOKS AS THOUGH, IN THIS HEAT...
...THEY'D RATHER BASK IN THE SUN THAN DO ANYTHING ABOUT THE DWINDLING FRESH-KILL PILE.
EVEN MY DAYLIGHT-WARRIOR MATE, BILLYSTORM, DOESN'T SEEM TOO ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT GOING OUT ON ANOTHER PATROL.
HMMPH. "DAYLIGHT-WARRIORS."
WHAT WAS THAT, ROCKSHADE? DID YOU WANT TO SAY SOMETHING?
SURE--HOW ABOUT THIS? "WHY DON'T YOU START PULLING YOUR WEIGHT AROUND HERE FOR ONCE?"

JUST BECAUSE YOUR BELLIES ARE FILLED WITH KITTYPET SLOP EVERY NIGHT DOESN'T MEAN THE REST OF THE CLAN SHOULD GO HUNGRY!
ROCKSHADE... THAT'S--
HEY, YOU KNOW WHAT? THAT'S FINE. I WON'T EAT ANYTHING IF THAT'LL MAKE YOU HAPPY.
YEAH, IT WOULD, ACTUALLY.
I BET TWO OF US COULD LIVE ON THE FOOD YOU GOBBLE DOWN EVERY DAY.
I DIDN'T REALIZE MY EATING HABITS UPSET YOU SO MUCH.
MAYBE I JUST WON'T EVEN BOTHER TURNING UP AT ALL?
THAT'D SUIT ME JUST FINE.
CLAN CATS SNAPPING AT EACH OTHER LIKE THIS MAKES MY HEAD POUND...
...AND IT'S HAPPENING MORE AND MORE AS THE HEAT WEARS ON.

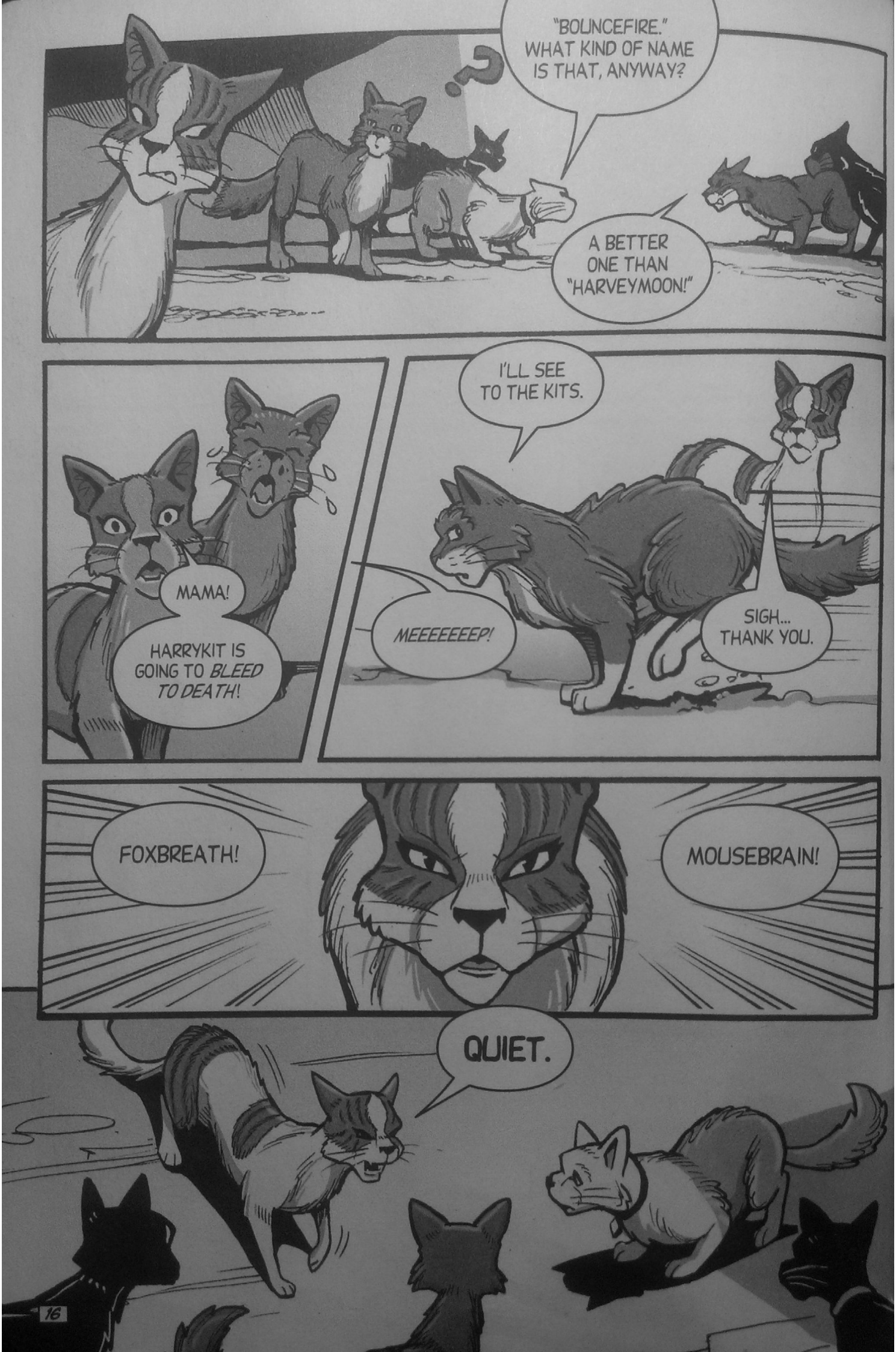

THEY'RE JUST FRAZZLED AND FRUSTRATED. I KNOW THEY DON'T MEAN THE THINGS THEY SAY.
BUT STILL, I'D BETTER GO AND PUT A STOP TO IT BEFORE ANYTHING BAD HAP--


I'LL GET YOU!

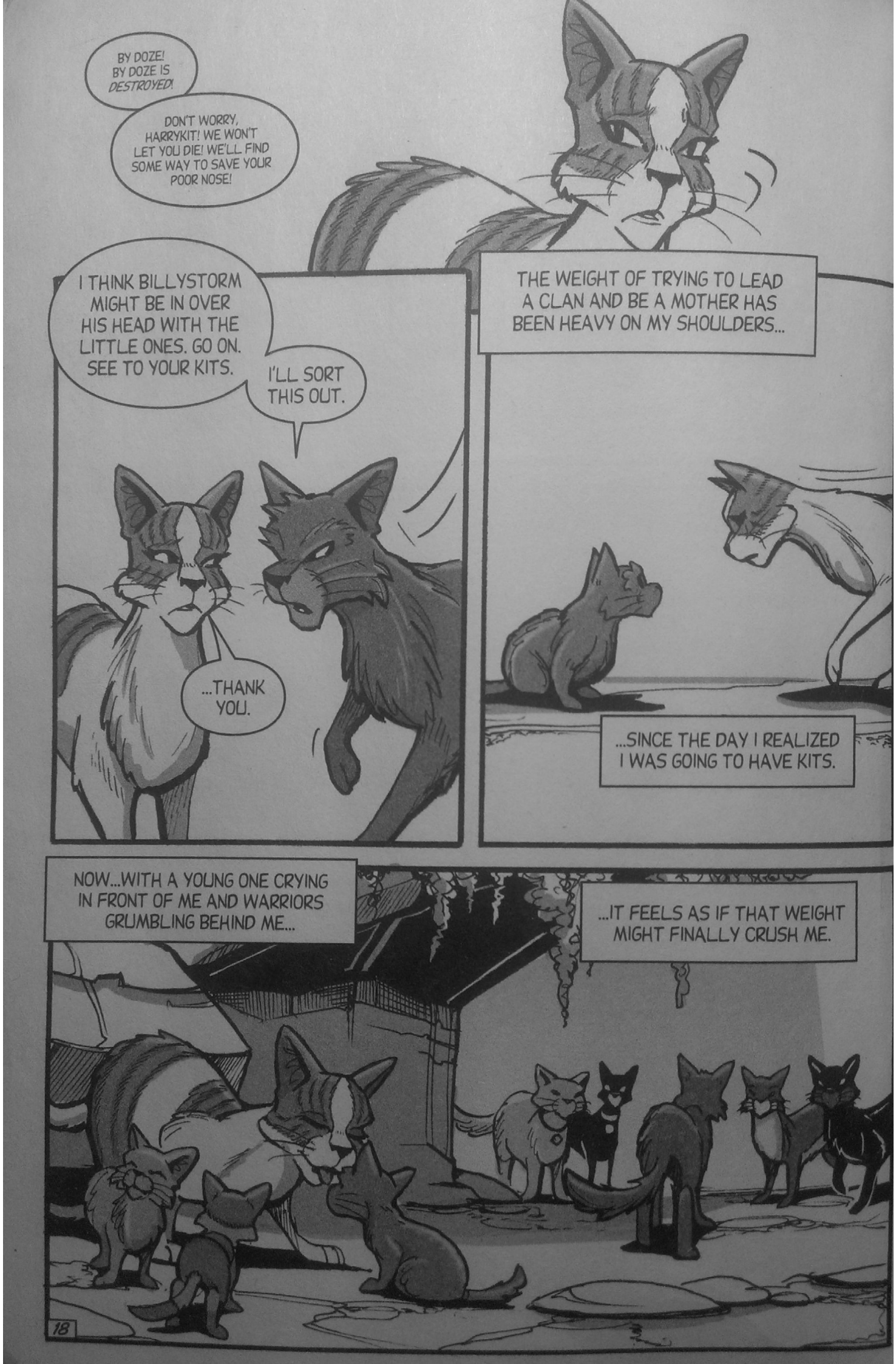
OH! UH...UH...

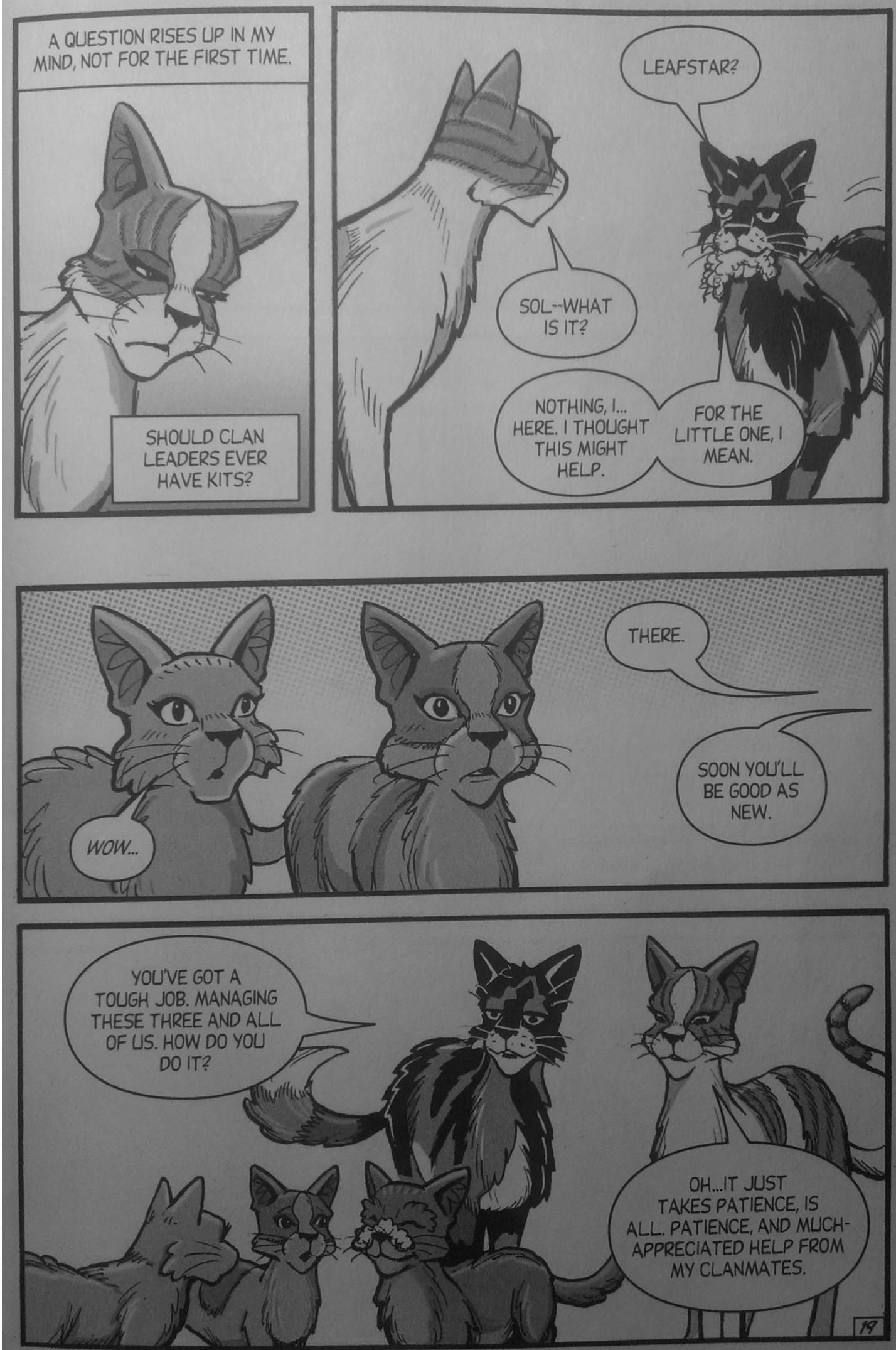
MEEEEEP!
HARRYKIT! WHAT HAPPENED?
MY NOSE! MEEEEEEEP! MEEEEEEP!

MEEEEEEEP!


"BOUNCEFIRE." WHAT KIND OF NAME IS THAT, ANYWAY?
A BETTER ONE THAN "HARVEYMOON!"
MAMA!
HARRYKIT IS GOING TO *BLEED TO DEATH*!
I'LL SEE TO THE KITS.
MEEEEEEEP!
SIGH... THANK YOU.
FOXBREATH!
MOUSEBRAIN!
QUIET.

THE DAYLIGHT-WARRIORS ARE A VALUABLE AND ESSENTIAL PART OF SKYCLAN.
THEY ARE ENTITLED TO EAT FRESH-KILL, BUT THEY MUST MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE PILE LIKE OTHER WARRIORS.
WE'RE ALL AWARE THAT HUNTING IS DIFFICULT IN THIS HEAT.
SO...PERHAPS WE SHOULD CHANGE PATROLS TO DAWN AND DUSK ONLY, AND SLEEP DURING THE DAY?
BUT...BUT...BUT... IF WE DO THAT, WON'T OUR ENEMIES FIND OUT AND ATTACK US?!
WE WOULDN'T ALL SLEEP AT ONCE, SHREWTOOTH.
OBVIOUSLY.
17

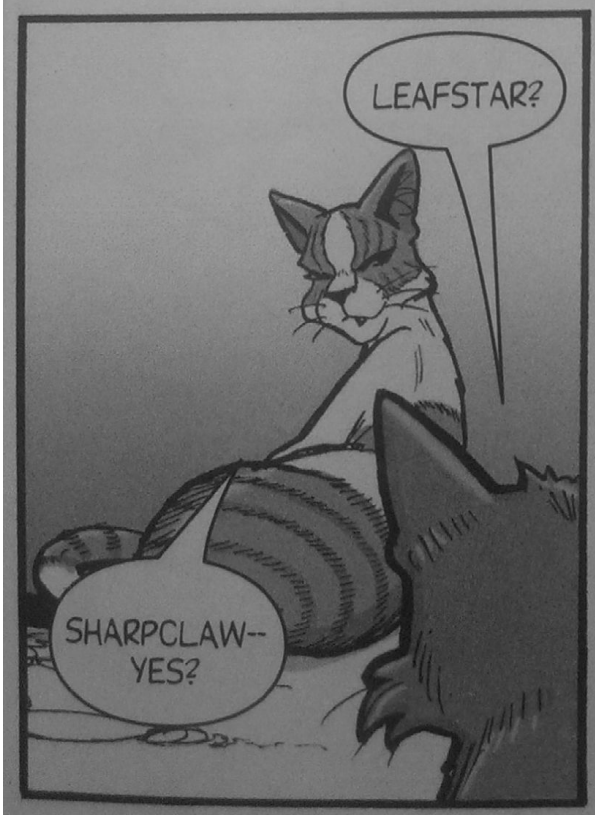

BY DOZE! BY DOZE IS DESTROYED!
DON'T WORRY, HARRYKIT! WE WON'T LET YOU DIE! WE'LL FIND SOME WAY TO SAVE YOUR POOR NOSE!
I THINK BILLYSTORM MIGHT BE IN OVER HIS HEAD WITH THE LITTLE ONES. GO ON. SEE TO YOUR KITS.
I'LL SORT THIS OUT.
...THANK YOU.
THE WEIGHT OF TRYING TO LEAD A CLAN AND BE A MOTHER HAS BEEN HEAVY ON MY SHOULDERS...
...SINCE THE DAY I REALIZED I WAS GOING TO HAVE KITS.
NOW...WITH A YOUNG ONE CRYING IN FRONT OF ME AND WARRIORS GRUMBLING BEHIND ME...
...IT FEELS AS IF THAT WEIGHT MIGHT FINALLY CRUSH ME.
18

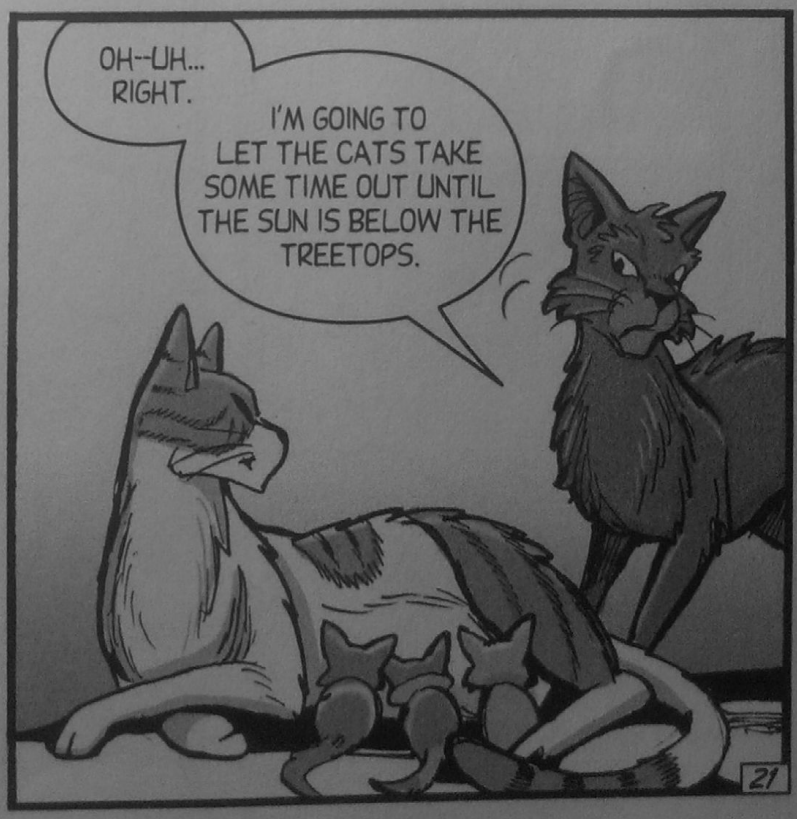

A QUESTION RISES UP IN MY MIND, NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME.
SHOULD CLAN LEADERS EVER HAVE KITS?
LEAFSTAR?
SOL--WHAT IS IT?
NOTHING, I... HERE. I THOUGHT THIS MIGHT HELP.
FOR THE LITTLE ONE, I MEAN.
THERE.
SOON YOU'LL BE GOOD AS NEW.
WOW...
YOU'VE GOT A TOUGH JOB. MANAGING THESE THREE AND ALL OF US. HOW DO YOU DO IT?
OH...IT JUST TAKES PATIENCE, IS ALL. PATIENCE, AND MUCH-APPRECIATED HELP FROM MY CLANMATES.
19

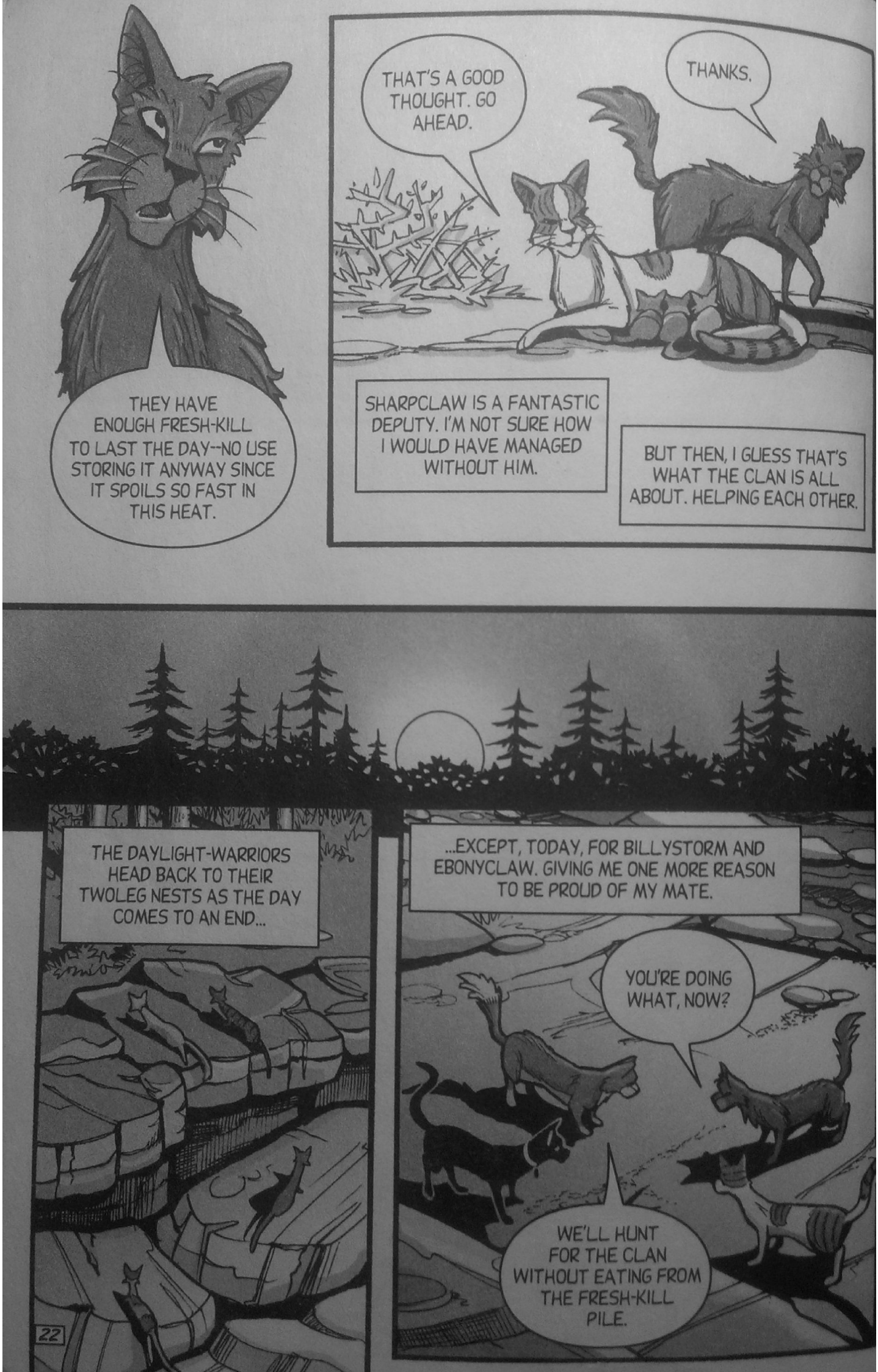
I BET IT'S HARD TO TELL US APART FROM THE KITS SOMETIMES, ISN'T IT?
HA-HA-HA... NOT USUALLY.
LEAFSTAR...I'M SORRY I COULDN'T SETTLE THE KITS DOWN ON MY OWN.
IT'S OKAY. THEY DON'T SEEM TO BE ABLE TO TAKE TWO BREATHS WITHOUT ME AT THE MOMENT, DO THEY?
WELL, YOU'RE A BRILLIANT MOTHER. AND THEY'RE STILL YOUNG KITS. THEY'LL GET MORE INDEPENDENT WITH TIME.
AHEM...
SOL, DON'T YOU HAVE A PATROL TO GO ON?
NOT THAT I KNOW OF! WHY? DO YOU WANT TO LEAD ONE?

MAMA! MAMA! HARRYKIT'S NOSE IS GOING TO BE OKAY!
YEAH! PLUS, WE'RE HUNGRY!
OH? YOU'VE DECIDED THAT, HAVE YOU?

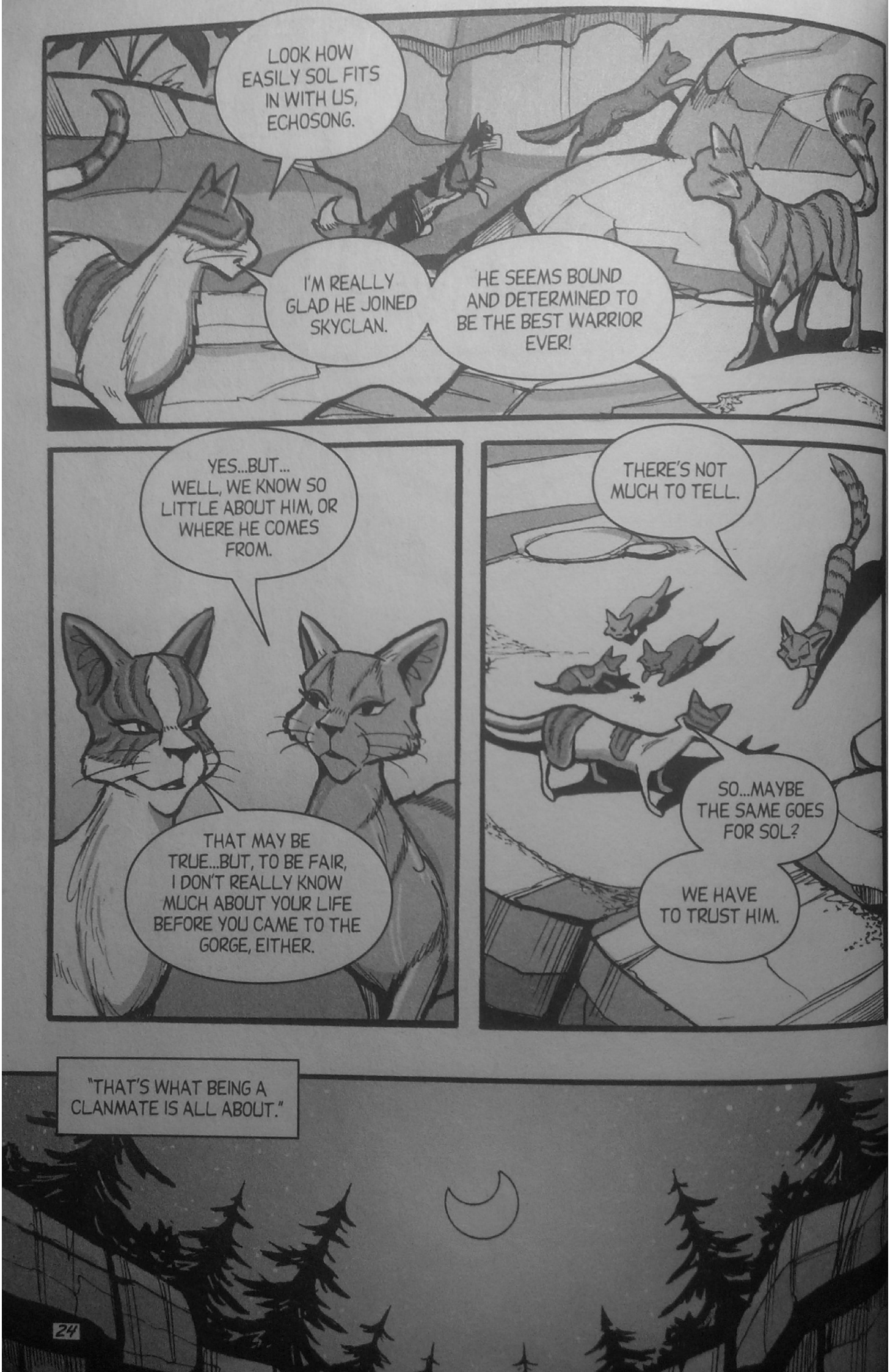
LET'S DISCUSS PATROLS AND SUCH LATER, SHALL WE?
GOOD IDEA.
OKAY.


LEAFSTAR?
SHARPCLAW-- YES?


OH--UH... RIGHT.
I'M GOING TO LET THE CATS TAKE SOME TIME OUT UNTIL THE SUN IS BELOW THE TREETOPS.


THEY HAVE ENOUGH FRESH-KILL TO LAST THE DAY--NO USE STORING IT ANYWAY SINCE IT SPOILS SO FAST IN THIS HEAT.
THAT'S A GOOD THOUGHT. GO AHEAD.
THANKS.
SHARPCLAW IS A FANTASTIC DEPUTY. I'M NOT SURE HOW I WOULD HAVE MANAGED WITHOUT HIM.
BUT THEN, I GUESS THAT'S WHAT THE CLAN IS ALL ABOUT. HELPING EACH OTHER.
THE DAYLIGHT-WARRIORS HEAD BACK TO THEIR TWOLEG NESTS AS THE DAY COMES TO AN END...
...EXCEPT, TODAY, FOR BILLYSTORM AND EBONYCLAW. GIVING ME ONE MORE REASON TO BE PROUD OF MY MATE.
YOU'RE DOING WHAT, NOW?
WE'LL HUNT FOR THE CLAN WITHOUT EATING FROM THE FRESH-KILL PILE.
22

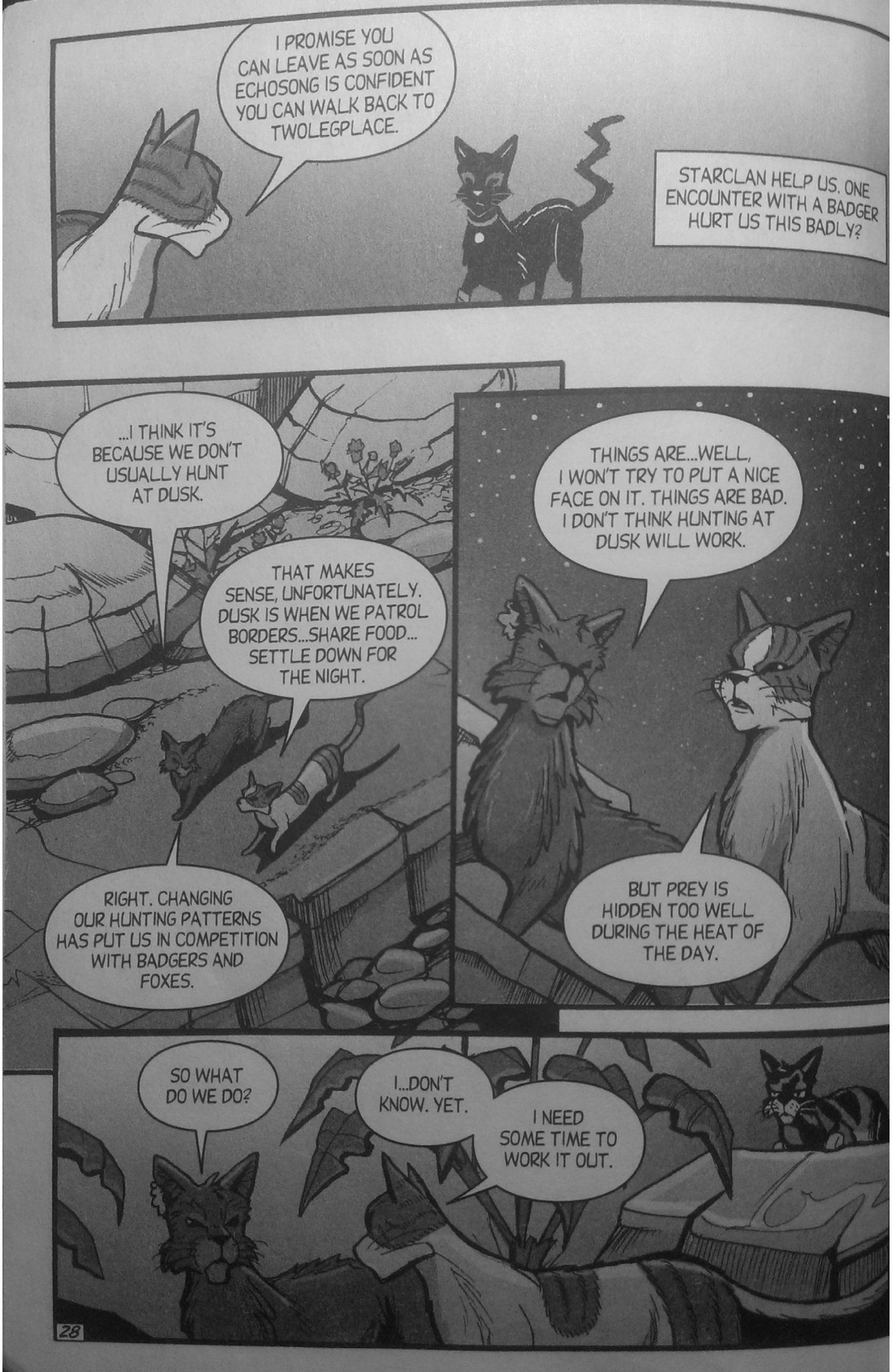
RIGHT. WE KNOW WE'LL BE FED WHEN WE GET BACK TO OUR HOUSEFOLK. IT ONLY SEEMS FAIR.
IT'S THE LEAST WE CAN DO.
THANK YOU. BOTH OF YOU.
ALL RIGHT, I WANT THREE PATROLS, FRONT AND CENTER! WARRIORS AND APPRENTICES BOTH! MOVE!
SHARPCLAW DROPS EASILY INTO HIS ROLE OF SHOUTING ORDERS, BUT I CAN TELL... TODAY, IT HIDES HIS RELIEF.
AS LONG AS THE HEAT KEEPS UP, WE NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET.
WE WANNA GO ON PATROL TOO, MAMA!
YEAH! I WANNA BRING BACK A SKIRREL!
STARCLAN HELP ME...THE KITS'VE BEEN NAPPING ALL AFTERNOON.
IT'LL BE A MIRACLE IF I GET ANY SLEEP AT ALL TONIGHT.

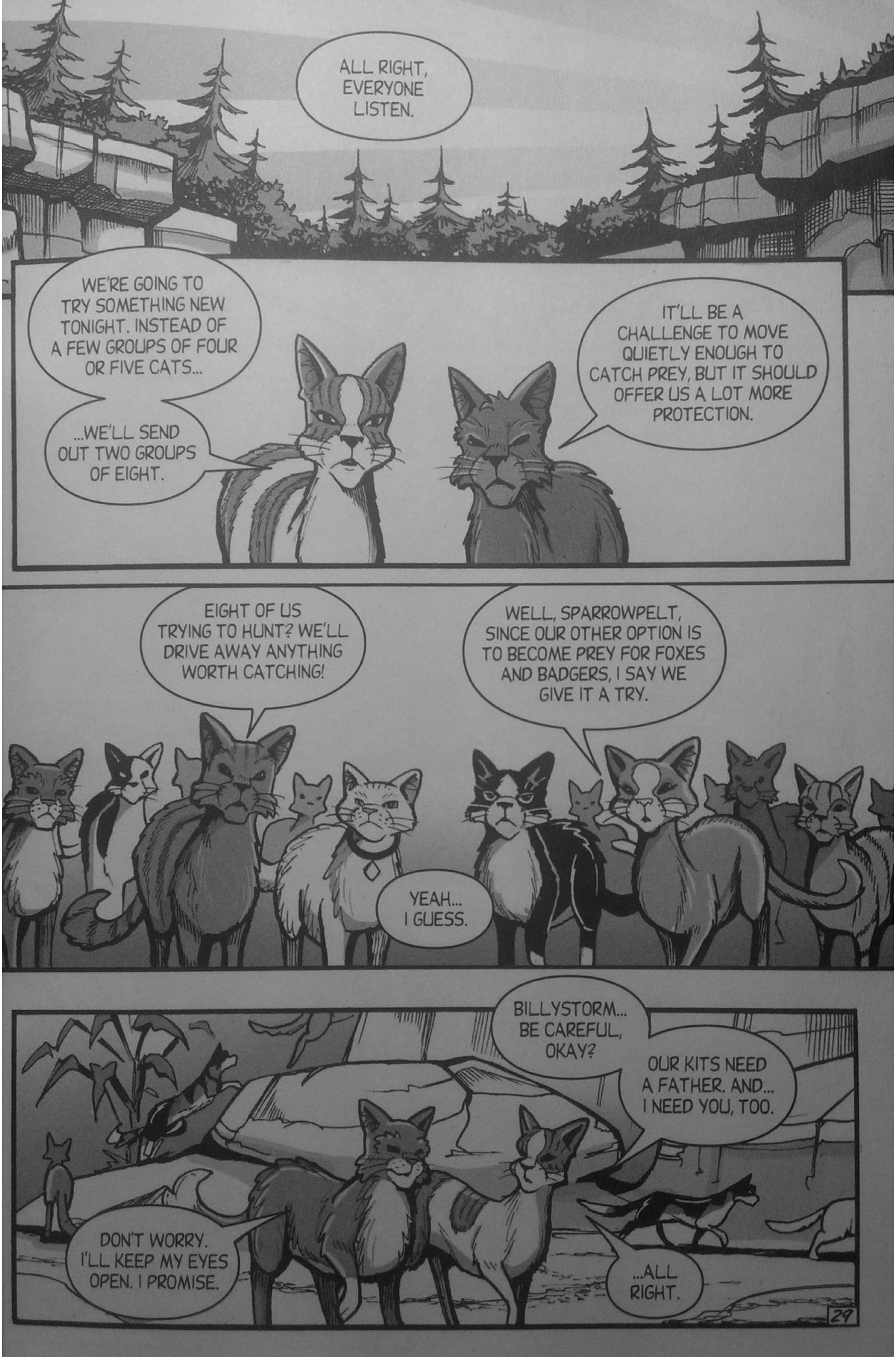

LOOK HOW EASILY SOL FITS IN WITH US, ECHOSONG.
I'M REALLY GLAD HE JOINED SKYCLAN.
HE SEEMS BOUND AND DETERMINED TO BE THE BEST WARRIOR EVER!
YES...BUT... WELL, WE KNOW SO LITTLE ABOUT HIM, OR WHERE HE COMES FROM.
THAT MAY BE TRUE...BUT, TO BE FAIR, I DON'T REALLY KNOW MUCH ABOUT YOUR LIFE BEFORE YOU CAME TO THE GORGE, EITHER.
THERE'S NOT MUCH TO TELL.
SO...MAYBE THE SAME GOES FOR SOL?
WE HAVE TO TRUST HIM.
"THAT'S WHAT BEING A CLANMATE IS ALL ABOUT."

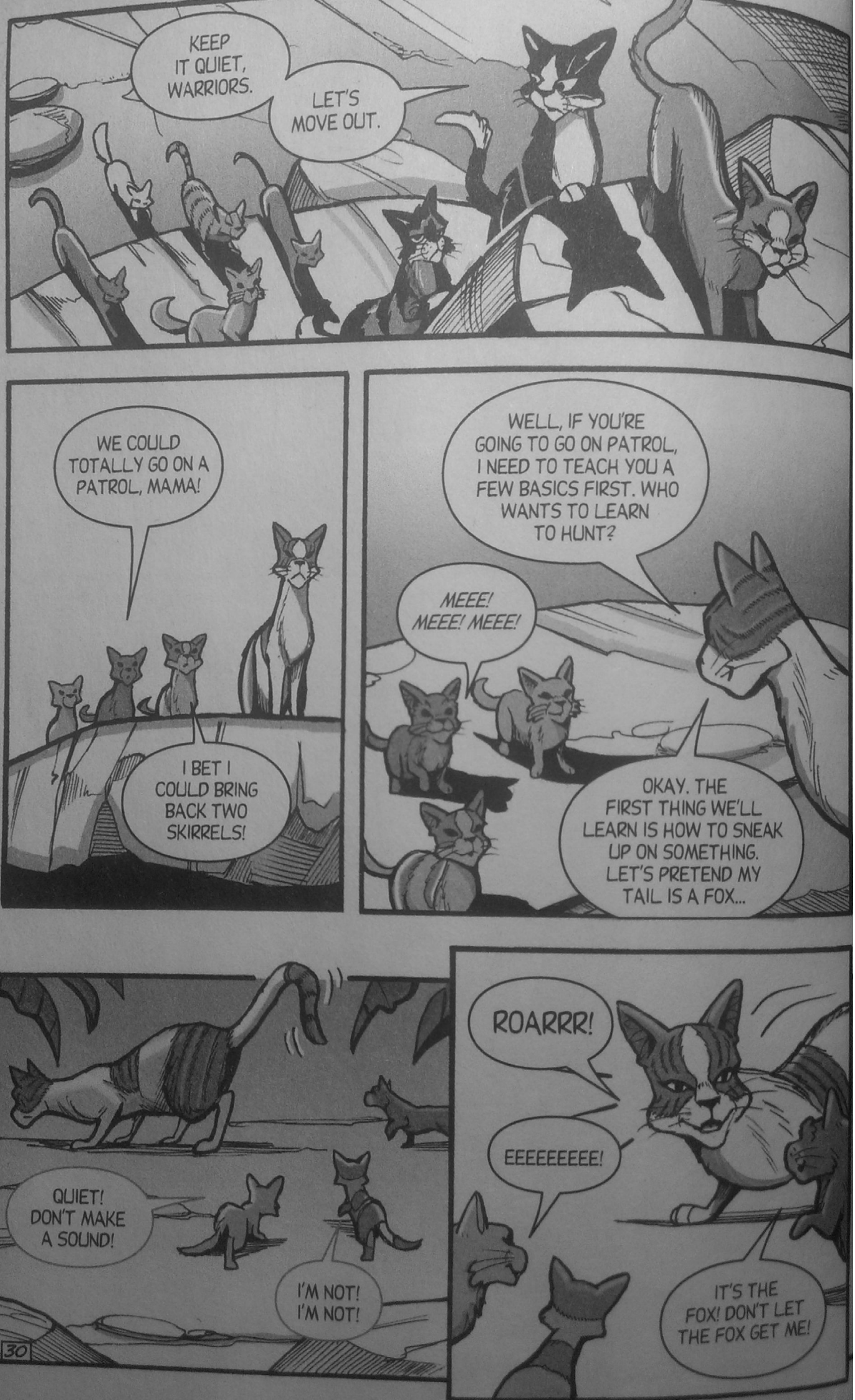
THE KITS ARE FINALLY ASLEEP. THOUGH I THINK GETTING THEM THERE HAS MADE ME JUST AS SLEEPY AS THEY ARE.
BUT JUST AS I THINK ABOUT CLOSING MY EYES...
HELP! WE NEED HELP!
INJURED CATS!
ECHOSONG!
COME HERE AT ONCE!
25

OH, EBONYCLAW, YOUR LEG!
CAN YOU MOVE IT?
YES. IT JUST H-HURTS...
MAMA?
M-MAMA?
MEEEEEEEEP!
MEEP MEEP MEEEEEEP!
I'LL SEE TO THE KITS, LEAFSTAR. DON'T WORRY. WE'LL PLAY A GAME OR SOMETHING.
THANK YOU, HONEYPAW. I APPRECIATE IT.
HAPPY TO DO IT.

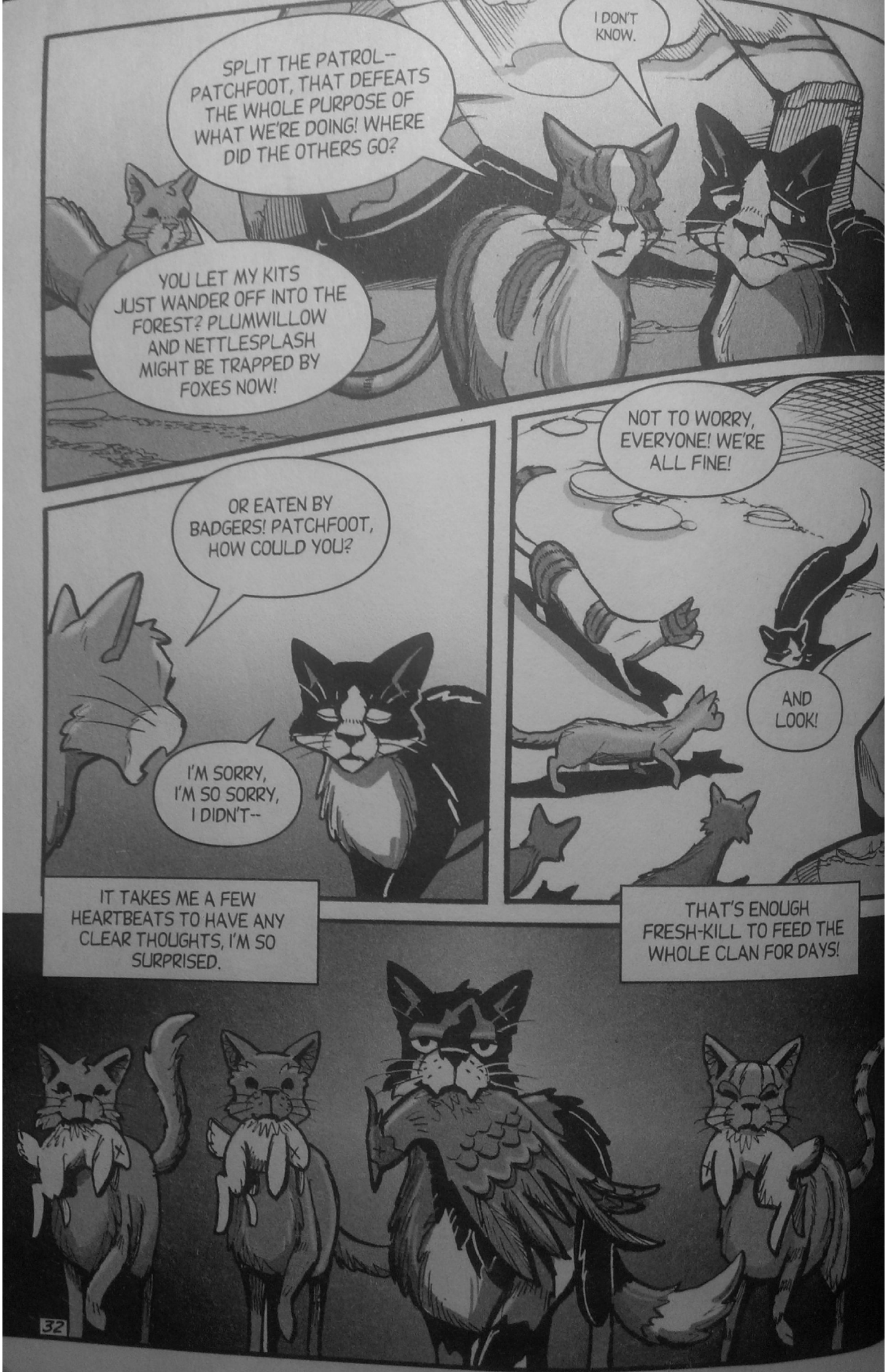
WHAT HAPPENED OUT THERE?
WE MET A BADGER.
WE DIDN'T WANT THE BADGER'S WORMS AND GRUBS, OF COURSE...
...BUT THE BADGER FELT THREATENED ANYWAY AND TURNED ON US.
WE MANAGED TO DRIVE IT FARTHER INTO THE WOODS, BUT EVERY ONE OF US GOT HURT.
EBONYCLAW GOT A NASTY BITE ON HER FRONT LEG.
SHE'S GOING TO HAVE TO STAY THE NIGHT SO I CAN KEEP AN EYE ON HER.
OH--A-ARE YOU SURE?
I DON'T WANT MY HOUSEFOLK TO WORRY ABOUT ME...


I PROMISE YOU CAN LEAVE AS SOON AS ECHOSONG IS CONFIDENT YOU CAN WALK BACK TO TWOLEGPLACE.
STARCLAN HELP US. ONE ENCOUNTER WITH A BADGER HURT US THIS BADLY?
...I THINK IT'S BECAUSE WE DON'T USUALLY HUNT AT DUSK.
THAT MAKES SENSE, UNFORTUNATELY. DUSK IS WHEN WE PATROL BORDERS...SHARE FOOD... SETTLE DOWN FOR THE NIGHT.
RIGHT. CHANGING OUR HUNTING PATTERNS HAS PUT US IN COMPETITION WITH BADGERS AND FOXES.
THINGS ARE...WELL, I WON'T TRY TO PUT A NICE FACE ON IT. THINGS ARE BAD. I DON'T THINK HUNTING AT DUSK WILL WORK.
BUT PREY IS HIDDEN TOO WELL DURING THE HEAT OF THE DAY.
SO WHAT DO WE DO?
I...DON'T KNOW. YET.
I NEED SOME TIME TO WORK IT OUT.

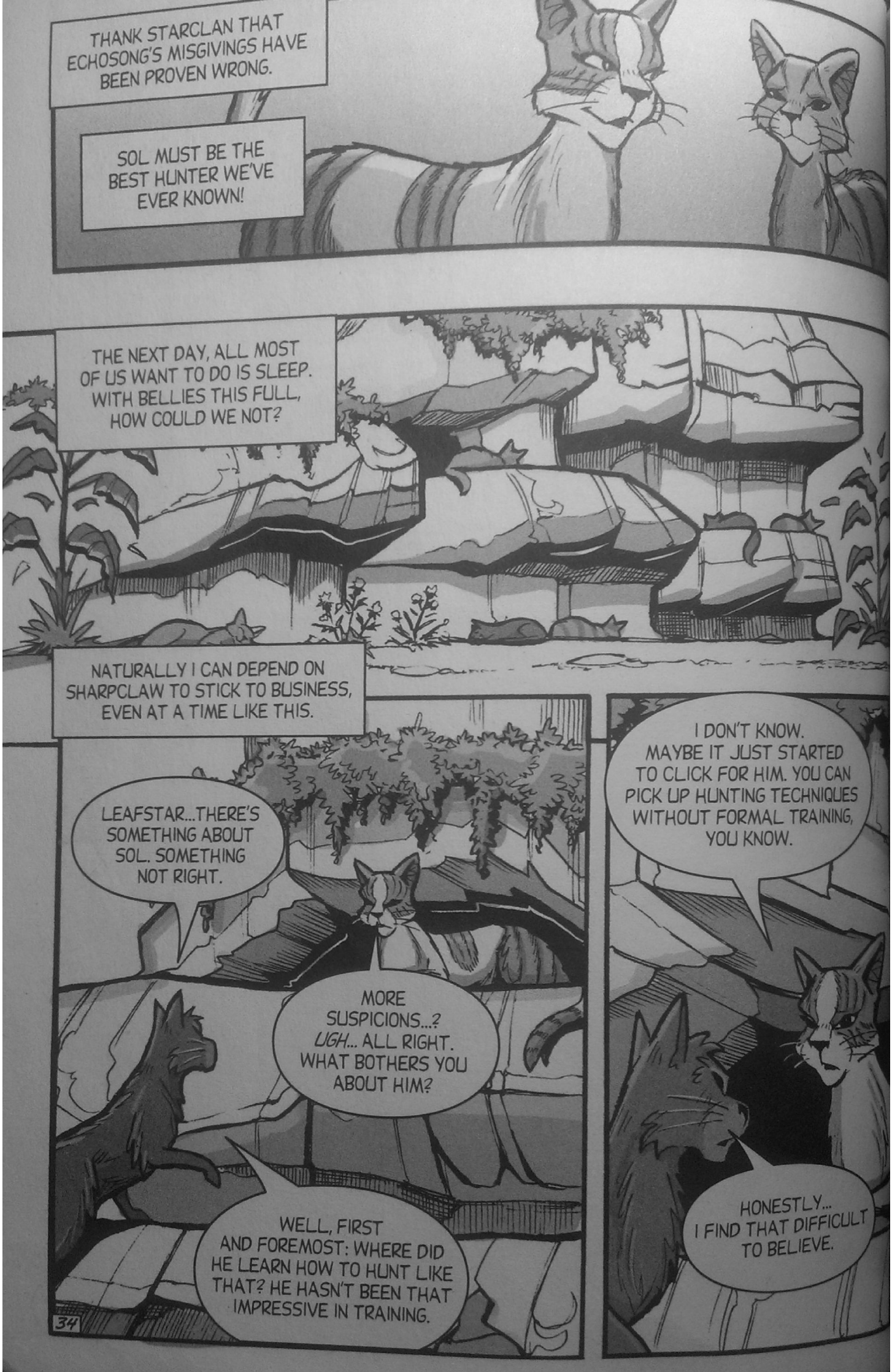

ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE LISTEN.
WE'RE GOING TO TRY SOMETHING NEW TONIGHT. INSTEAD OF A FEW GROUPS OF FOUR OR FIVE CATS...
...WE'LL SEND OUT TWO GROUPS OF EIGHT.
IT'LL BE A CHALLENGE TO MOVE QUIETLY ENOUGH TO CATCH PREY, BUT IT SHOULD OFFER US A LOT MORE PROTECTION.
EIGHT OF US TRYING TO HUNT? WE'LL DRIVE AWAY ANYTHING WORTH CATCHING!
WELL, SPARROWPELT, SINCE OUR OTHER OPTION IS TO BECOME PREY FOR FOXES AND BADGERS, I SAY WE GIVE IT A TRY.
YEAH... I GUESS.
BILLYSTORM... BE CAREFUL, OKAY?
OUR KITS NEED A FATHER. AND... I NEED YOU, TOO.
DON'T WORRY. I'LL KEEP MY EYES OPEN. I PROMISE.
...ALL RIGHT.
29

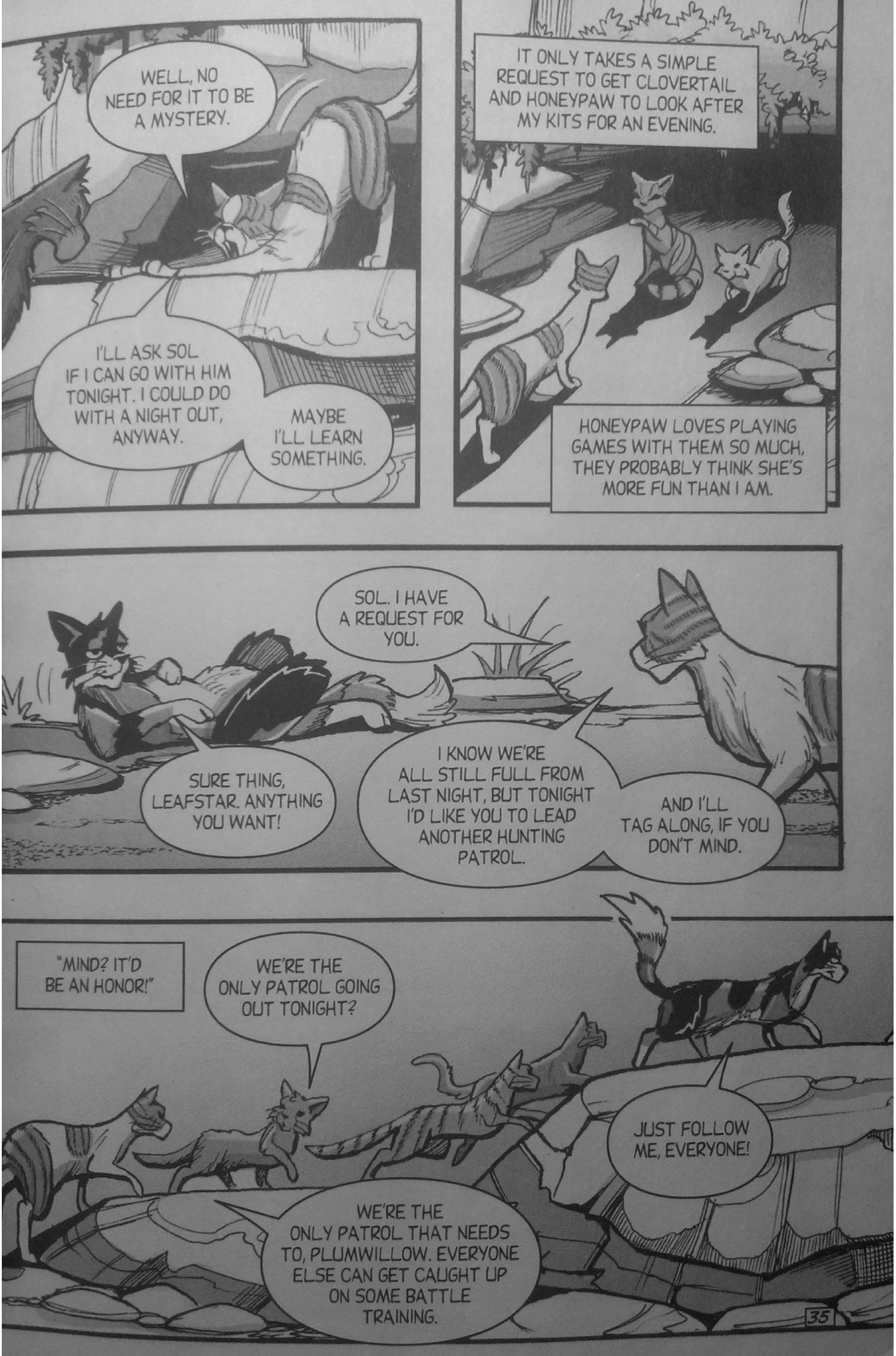

KEEP IT QUIET, WARRIORS.
LET'S MOVE OUT.
WE COULD TOTALLY GO ON A PATROL, MAMA!
I BET I COULD BRING BACK TWO SKIRRELS!
WELL, IF YOU'RE GOING TO GO ON PATROL, I NEED TO TEACH YOU A FEW BASICS FIRST. WHO WANTS TO LEARN TO HUNT?
MEEE! MEEE! MEEE!
OKAY. THE FIRST THING WE'LL LEARN IS HOW TO SNEAK UP ON SOMETHING. LET'S PRETEND MY TAIL IS A FOX...
QUIET! DON'T MAKE A SOUND!
I'M NOT! I'M NOT!
ROARRR!
EEEEEEEEE!
IT'S THE FOX! DON'T LET THE FOX GET ME!

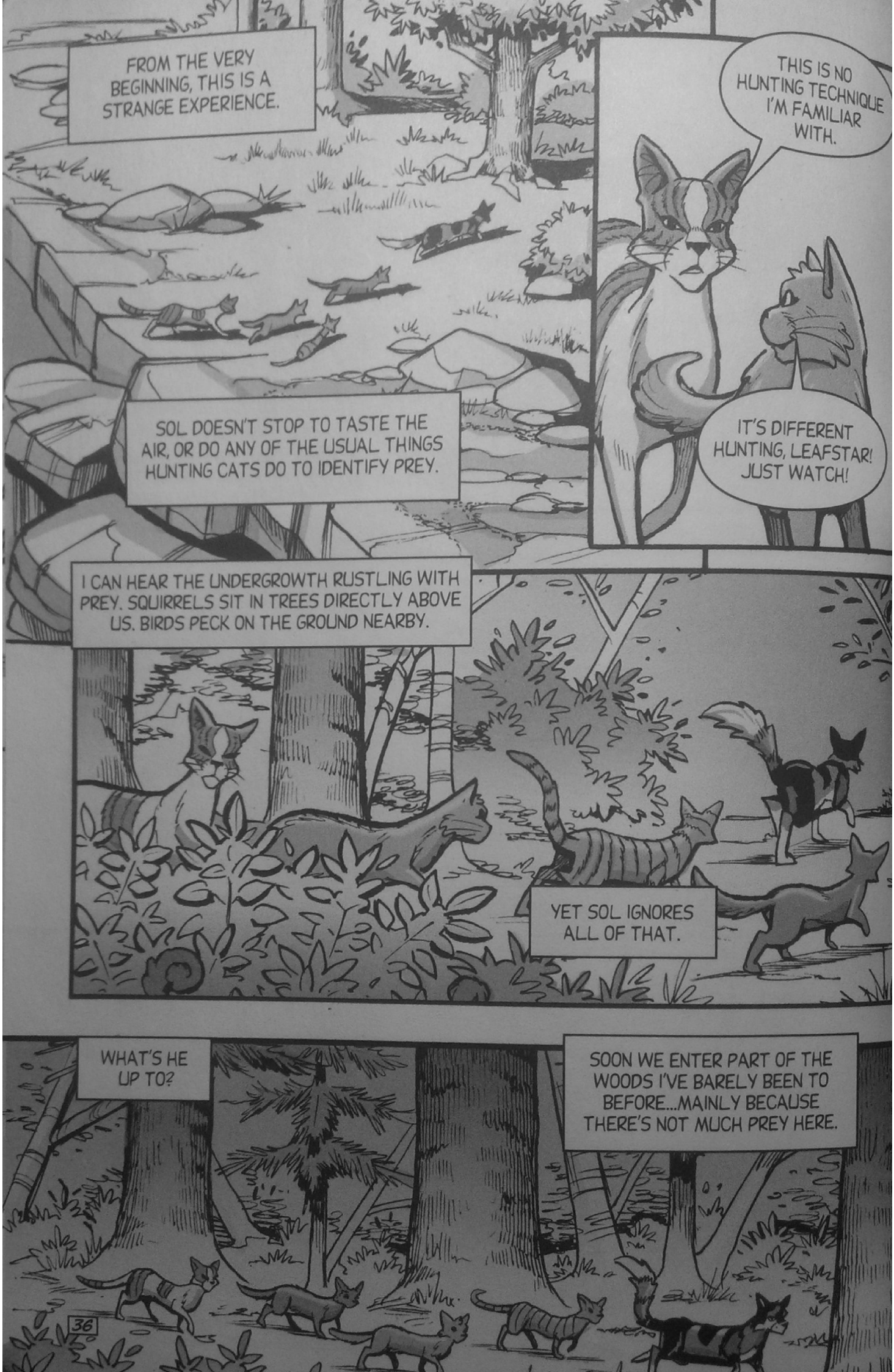
BILLYSTORM RETURNS SAFELY, AND I THANK STARCLAN FOR THAT...BUT I CAN SEE THE DISAPPOINTMENT ON HIS FACE.
IT'S JUST AS WE FEARED: EIGHT CATS IN A GROUP CAN BARELY CATCH ANYTHING WORTH EATING.
UM... WE'RE BACK, TOO.
PATCHFOOT, WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE IS EVERYONE ELSE?
WELL, SEE, SOL HAD AN IDEA...
WHAT? WHAT IDEA?
HE, UM...WELL, HE DIDN'T EXACTLY SAY. BUT HE TALKED US INTO LETTING HIM SPLIT THE PATROL IN TWO.

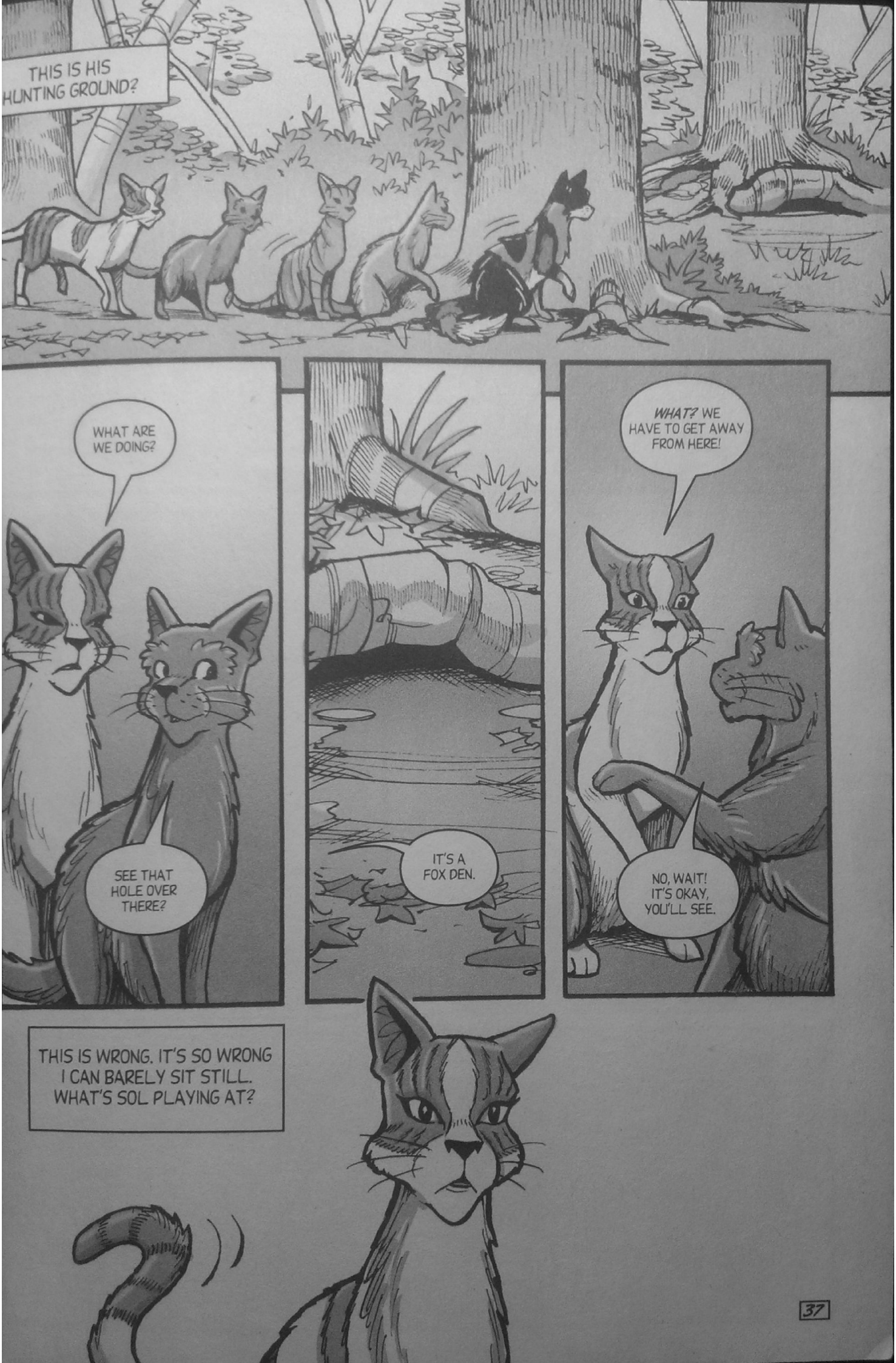

I DON'T KNOW.
SPLIT THE PATROL-- PATCHFOOT, THAT DEFEATS THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF WHAT WE'RE DOING! WHERE DID THE OTHERS GO?
YOU LET MY KITS JUST WANDER OFF INTO THE FOREST? PLUMWILLOW AND NETTLESPLASH MIGHT BE TRAPPED BY FOXES NOW!
NOT TO WORRY, EVERYONE! WE'RE ALL FINE!
OR EATEN BY BADGERS! PATCHFOOT, HOW COULD YOU?
AND LOOK!
I'M SORRY, I'M SO SORRY, I DIDN'T--
IT TAKES ME A FEW HEARTBEATS TO HAVE ANY CLEAR THOUGHTS, I'M SO SURPRISED.
THAT'S ENOUGH FRESH-KILL TO FEED THE WHOLE CLAN FOR DAYS!

THIS IS AMAZING!
HOW'D YOU CATCH ALL THIS?
YOU'RE THE BEST HUNTERS EVER!
NEVER SHOULD'VE DOUBTED YOU!
THIS SOLVES THE WHOLE PROBLEM!
WE SHOULD CELEBRATE!
WHAT'S ALL THAT NOISE DOWN THERE?
CAN'T YOU LET US SLEEP IN PEACE?
TANGLE! LICHENFUR! COME AND JOIN US!
WE HAVEN'T HAD THIS MUCH FOOD IN MOONS!


THANK STARCLAN THAT ECHOSONG'S MISGIVINGS HAVE BEEN PROVEN WRONG.
SOL MUST BE THE BEST HUNTER WE'VE EVER KNOWN!
THE NEXT DAY, ALL MOST OF US WANT TO DO IS SLEEP. WITH BELLIES THIS FULL, HOW COULD WE NOT?
NATURALLY I CAN DEPEND ON SHARPCLAW TO STICK TO BUSINESS, EVEN AT A TIME LIKE THIS.
LEAFSTAR...THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT SOL. SOMETHING NOT RIGHT.
MORE SUSPICIONS...? *UGH*... ALL RIGHT. WHAT BOTHERS YOU ABOUT HIM?
WELL, FIRST AND FOREMOST: WHERE DID HE LEARN HOW TO HUNT LIKE THAT? HE HASN'T BEEN THAT IMPRESSIVE IN TRAINING.
I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE IT JUST STARTED TO CLICK FOR HIM. YOU CAN PICK UP HUNTING TECHNIQUES WITHOUT FORMAL TRAINING, YOU KNOW.
HONESTLY... I FIND THAT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE.
34

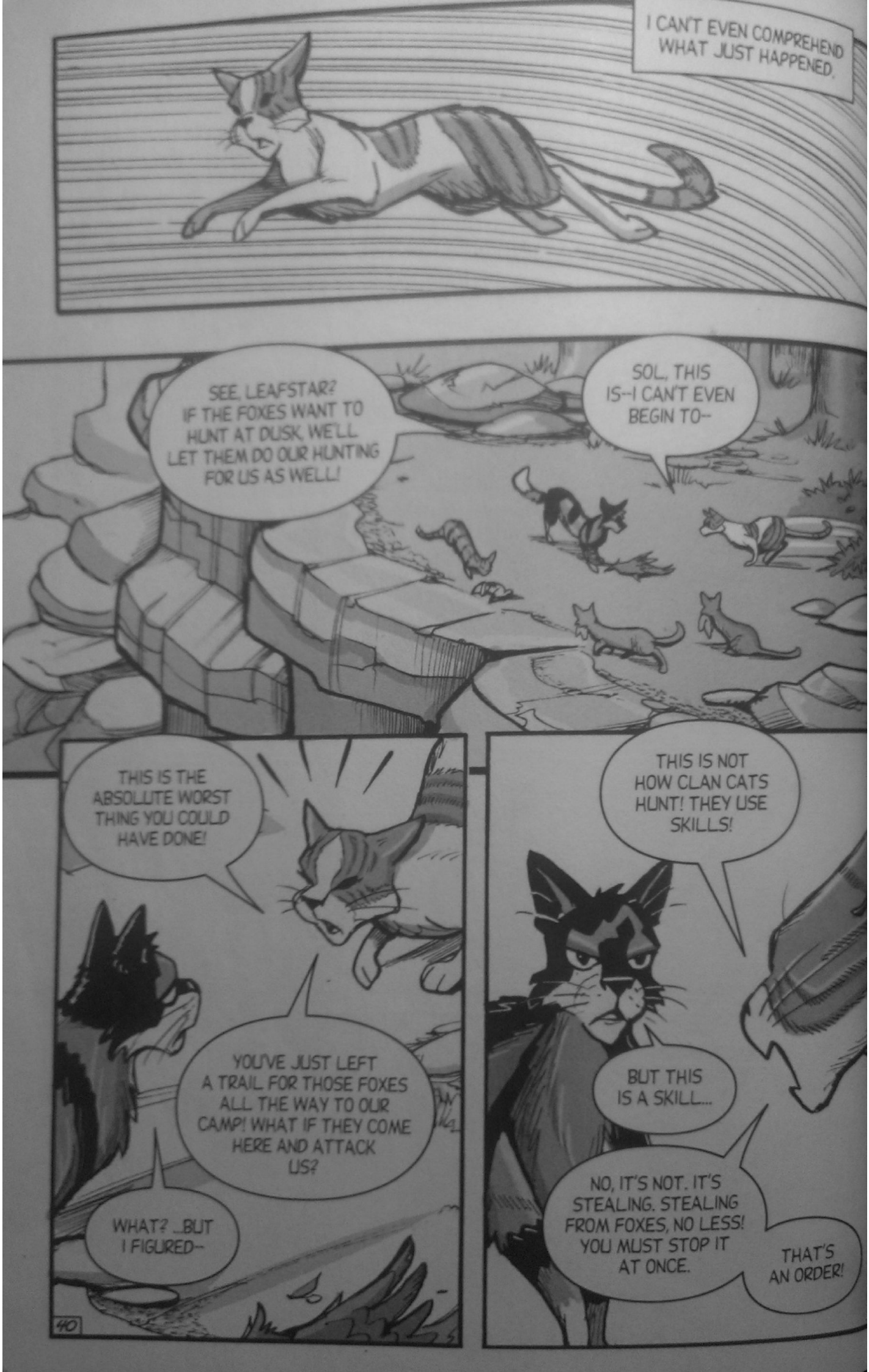

WELL, NO NEED FOR IT TO BE A MYSTERY.
I'LL ASK SOL IF I CAN GO WITH HIM TONIGHT. I COULD DO WITH A NIGHT OUT, ANYWAY.
MAYBE I'LL LEARN SOMETHING.
IT ONLY TAKES A SIMPLE REQUEST TO GET CLOVERTAIL AND HONEYPAW TO LOOK AFTER MY KITS FOR AN EVENING.
HONEYPAW LOVES PLAYING GAMES WITH THEM SO MUCH, THEY PROBABLY THINK SHE'S MORE FUN THAN I AM.
SOL. I HAVE A REQUEST FOR YOU.
SURE THING, LEAFSTAR. ANYTHING YOU WANT!
I KNOW WE'RE ALL STILL FULL FROM LAST NIGHT, BUT TONIGHT I'D LIKE YOU TO LEAD ANOTHER HUNTING PATROL.
AND I'LL TAG ALONG, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
"MIND? IT'D BE AN HONOR!"
WE'RE THE ONLY PATROL GOING OUT TONIGHT?
JUST FOLLOW ME, EVERYONE!
WE'RE THE ONLY PATROL THAT NEEDS TO, PLUMWILLOW. EVERYONE ELSE CAN GET CAUGHT UP ON SOME BATTLE TRAINING.


FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, THIS IS A STRANGE EXPERIENCE.
THIS IS NO HUNTING TECHNIQUE I'M FAMILIAR WITH.
SOL DOESN'T STOP TO TASTE THE AIR, OR DO ANY OF THE USUAL THINGS HUNTING CATS DO TO IDENTIFY PREY.
IT'S DIFFERENT HUNTING, LEAFSTAR! JUST WATCH!
I CAN HEAR THE UNDERGROWTH RUSTLING WITH PREY. SQUIRRELS SIT IN TREES DIRECTLY ABOVE US. BIRDS PECK ON THE GROUND NEARBY.
YET SOL IGNORES ALL OF THAT.
WHAT'S HE UP TO?
SOON WE ENTER PART OF THE WOODS I'VE BARELY BEEN TO BEFORE...MAINLY BECAUSE THERE'S NOT MUCH PREY HERE.
36


THIS IS HIS HUNTING GROUND?
WHAT ARE WE DOING?
SEE THAT HOLE OVER THERE?
IT'S A FOX DEN.
WHAT? WE HAVE TO GET AWAY FROM HERE!
NO, WAIT! IT'S OKAY, YOU'LL SEE.
THIS IS WRONG. IT'S SO WRONG I CAN BARELY SIT STILL. WHAT'S SOL PLAYING AT?

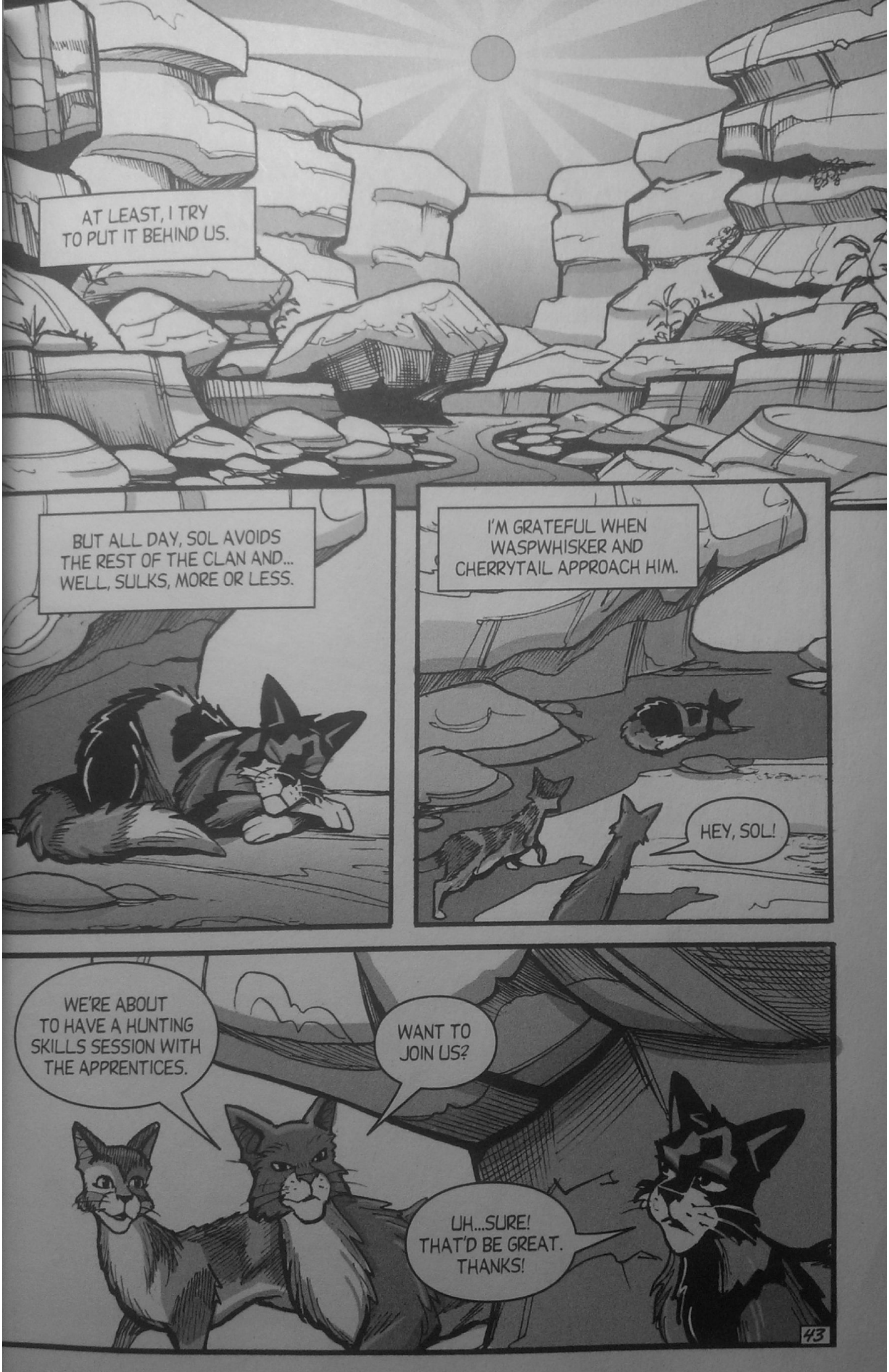
THE SMELL OF THE FOXES HITS ME JUST BEFORE I HEAR THEIR PADDING FEET.
THANK STARCLAN WE'RE DOWNWIND, OR THEY'D BE ALL OVER US!
WHY AREN'T WE RUNNING AWAY?
NOW!

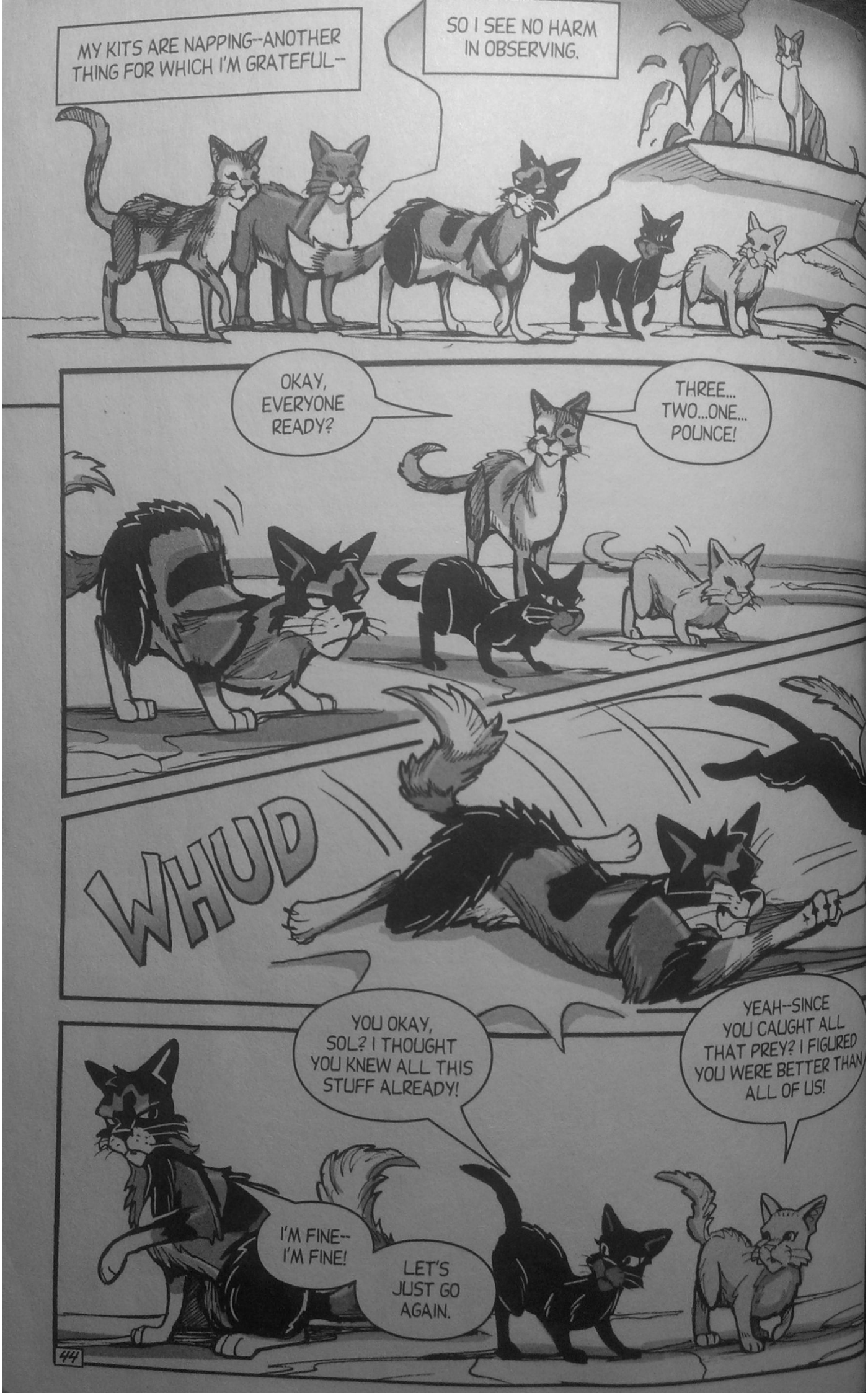
COME ON!
THE FOXES ARE BRINGING THEIR CUBS OUT OF THE DEN NOW... BRINGING THEM OUT TO FEED!
?
39


I CAN'T EVEN COMPREHEND WHAT JUST HAPPENED.
SEE, LEAFSTAR? IF THE FOXES WANT TO HUNT AT DUSK, WE'LL LET THEM DO OUR HUNTING FOR US AS WELL!
SOL, THIS IS--I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO--
THIS IS THE ABSOLUTE WORST THING YOU COULD HAVE DONE!
YOU'VE JUST LEFT A TRAIL FOR THOSE FOXES ALL THE WAY TO OUR CAMP! WHAT IF THEY COME HERE AND ATTACK US?
WHAT? ...BUT I FIGURED--
THIS IS NOT HOW CLAN CATS HUNT! THEY USE SKILLS!
BUT THIS IS A SKILL...
NO, IT'S NOT. IT'S STEALING. STEALING FROM FOXES, NO LESS! YOU MUST STOP IT AT ONCE.
THAT'S AN ORDER!
40

MADE IT BACK, HAVE YOU? I WAS--
--WOW! WHAT A HAUL! HOW DID YOU CATCH ALL THAT?
WE DIDN'T CATCH IT. A FOX DID.
...TELL ME YOU'RE JOKING!
LOOK, IT'S FOOD, THE FOXES DIDN'T FOLLOW US, AND WE'VE GOT ENOUGH TO FEED THE WHOLE CLAN USING ONLY FOUR CATS.
I DON'T SEE WHAT THE PROBLEM IS!
YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE WARRIOR CODE.
YOU'VE PUT THE WHOLE CLAN IN DANGER!
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT, LET'S JUST CALM DOWN, ALL OF US.
MAYBE IT'S OKAY IF THIS IS THE LAST TIME. SOL WAS ONLY TRYING TO HELP.
NONE OF US WILL SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THIS TO THE REST OF THE CLAN.
NO USE IN UPSETTING EVERYONE IF THERE'S NO CAUSE FOR IT.
41

NONE OF YOU WILL SAY ANYTHING TO ANYONE ELSE ABOUT THIS, WILL YOU?
NO, LEAFSTAR.
YOU MUST LEARN TO HAVE FAITH IN YOUR OWN HUNTING SKILLS.
NOW COME ON, ALL OF YOU. IT'S TIME TO PUT THIS BEHIND US.

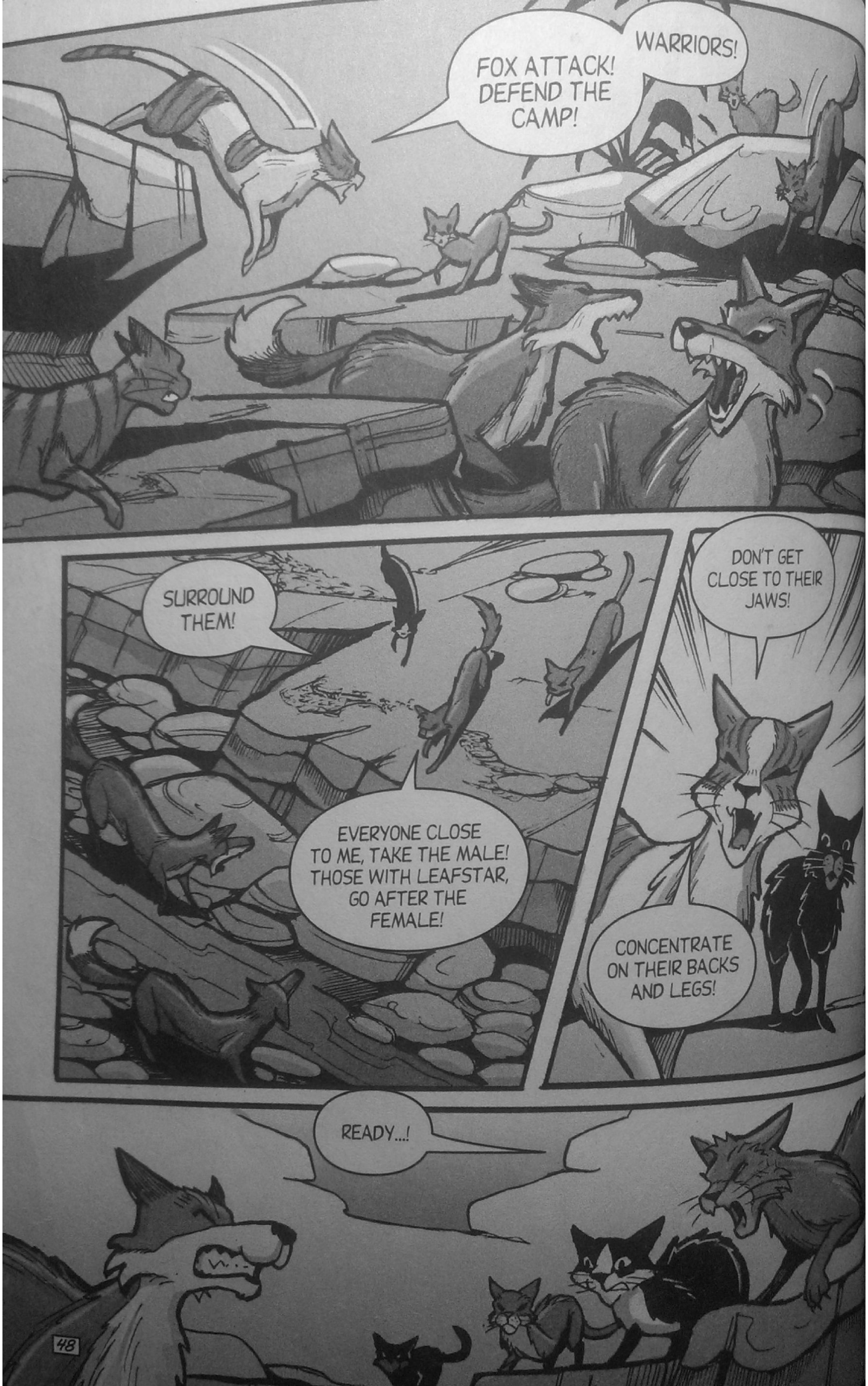

AT LEAST, I TRY TO PUT IT BEHIND US.
BUT ALL DAY, SOL AVOIDS THE REST OF THE CLAN AND... WELL, SULKS, MORE OR LESS.
I'M GRATEFUL WHEN WASPWHISKER AND CHERRYTAIL APPROACH HIM.
HEY, SOL!
WE'RE ABOUT TO HAVE A HUNTING SKILLS SESSION WITH THE APPRENTICES.
WANT TO JOIN US?
UH...SURE! THAT'D BE GREAT. THANKS!

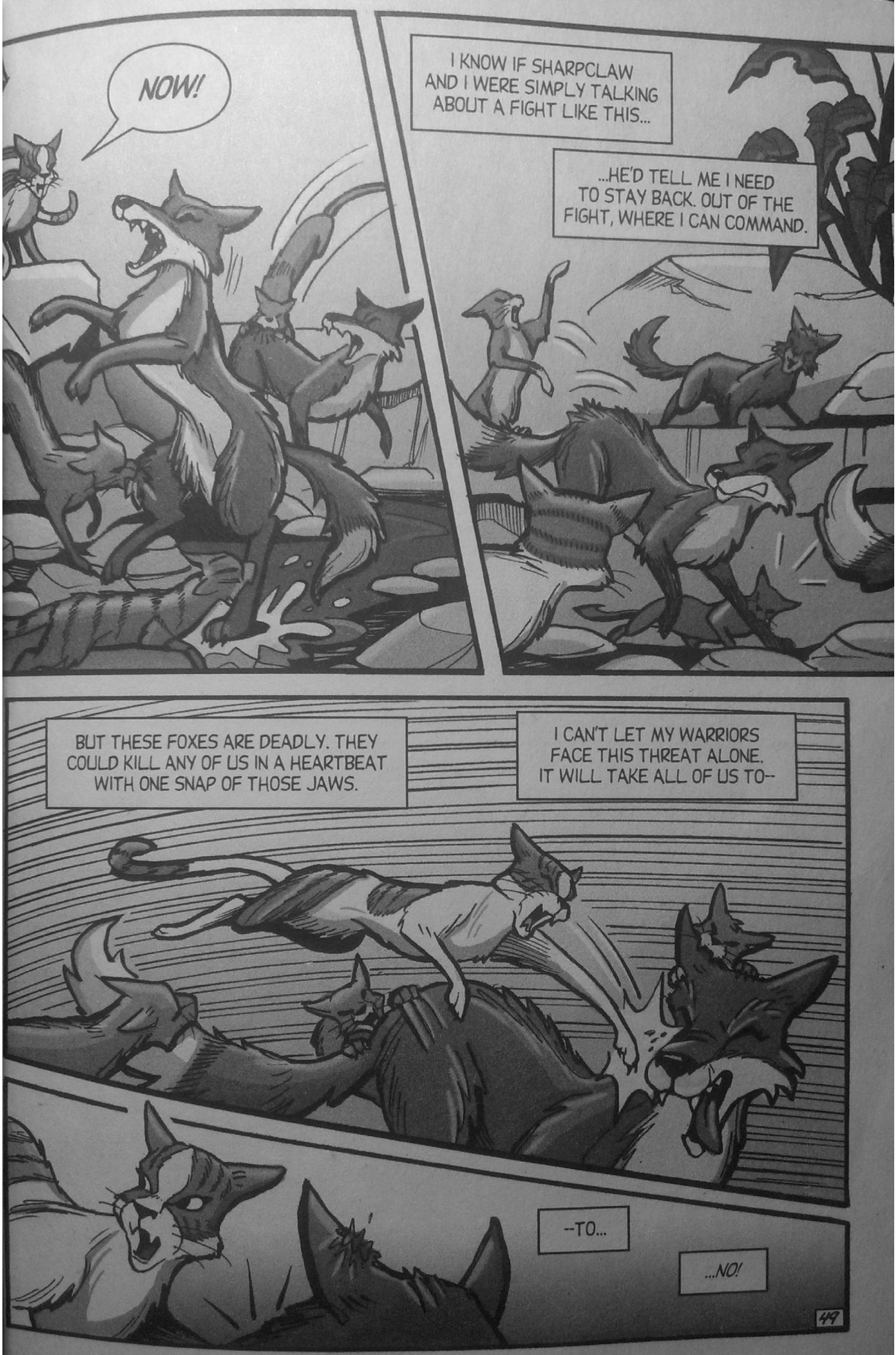

MY KITS ARE NAPPING--ANOTHER THING FOR WHICH I'M GRATEFUL--
SO I SEE NO HARM IN OBSERVING.
OKAY, EVERYONE READY?
THREE... TWO...ONE... POUNCE!
WHUD
YOU OKAY, SOL? I THOUGHT YOU KNEW ALL THIS STUFF ALREADY!
YEAH--SINCE YOU CAUGHT ALL THAT PREY? I FIGURED YOU WERE BETTER THAN ALL OF US!
I'M FINE-- I'M FINE!
LET'S JUST GO AGAIN.

WHUD
THE TRAINING SESSION DOES NOT GO WELL. I'M AFRAID HE'LL BE SULKING AGAIN IN NO TIME.
NOT EXACTLY A BORN HUNTER, IS HE?
SOL NEEDS SOME SPECIAL ATTENTION, SHARPCLAW. SOME ONE-ON-ONE TRAINING. ...I'LL DO IT MYSELF, IF I HAVE TO.
YOU'RE GOING TO A LOT OF TROUBLE FOR ONE CAT, LEAFSTAR.
HE WANTS TO BE A WARRIOR. WE OWE IT TO HIM TO GIVE HIM THE RIGHT TRAINING.
WE DON'T QUESTION APPRENTICES LIKE THIS, DO WE?
NO...YOU'RE RIGHT, WE DON'T.
I'LL ASK SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HIS WAY AROUND A HUNT TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH SOL. MAYBE PATCHFOOT. HE'S GOOD.
I'LL TELL YOU THIS, THOUGH. I'VE SEEN SOL TRY TO HUNT.
AND HE JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE ANY NATURAL SKILLS.
AT ALL.

plop
THOUGHT I HEARD...A FOOTSTEP?
tep
THERE IT IS AGAIN.
DID SHARPCLAW SEND OUT A NIGHT PATROL WITHOUT TELLING ME?

OH, NO.
OH, NO!


FOX ATTACK! DEFEND THE CAMP!
WARRIORS!
SURROUND THEM!
EVERYONE CLOSE TO ME, TAKE THE MALE! THOSE WITH LEAFSTAR, GO AFTER THE FEMALE!
DON'T GET CLOSE TO THEIR JAWS!
CONCENTRATE ON THEIR BACKS AND LEGS!
READY...!


NOW!
I KNOW IF SHARPCLAW AND I WERE SIMPLY TALKING ABOUT A FIGHT LIKE THIS...
...HE'D TELL ME I NEED TO STAY BACK. OUT OF THE FIGHT, WHERE I CAN COMMAND.
BUT THESE FOXES ARE DEADLY. THEY COULD KILL ANY OF US IN A HEARTBEAT WITH ONE SNAP OF THOSE JAWS.
I CAN'T LET MY WARRIORS FACE THIS THREAT ALONE. IT WILL TAKE ALL OF US TO--
--TO...
...NO!
49

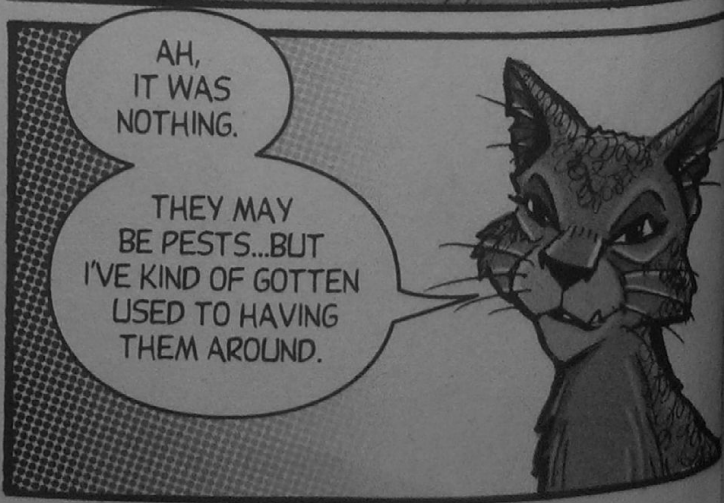
HERE WE COME, MAMA!
WE'LL HELP YOU FIGHT THOSE MEAN FOXES!
JUST HOLD ON!
SOL! GET IN HERE!
TAKE MY PLACE!
SOL! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?
I...I...
SOL, PLEASE!
I NEED TO SAVE MY KITS!

I CAN'T LET GO--I JUST CAN'T. OTHER CATS MIGHT DIE IF I DO.
BUT IF I DON'T, MY KITS WILL...!
YOU'RE GOING NOWHERE!
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, YOU SORRY LITTLE SCRAPS!
AWWWW...
CHOMP
THANK STARCLAN!
NOW...IT'S TIME TO FINISH THIS!

YIP YIP
YIP YIP!
THAT'S RIGHT, YOU MANGY BEAST!

KEEP RUNNING!

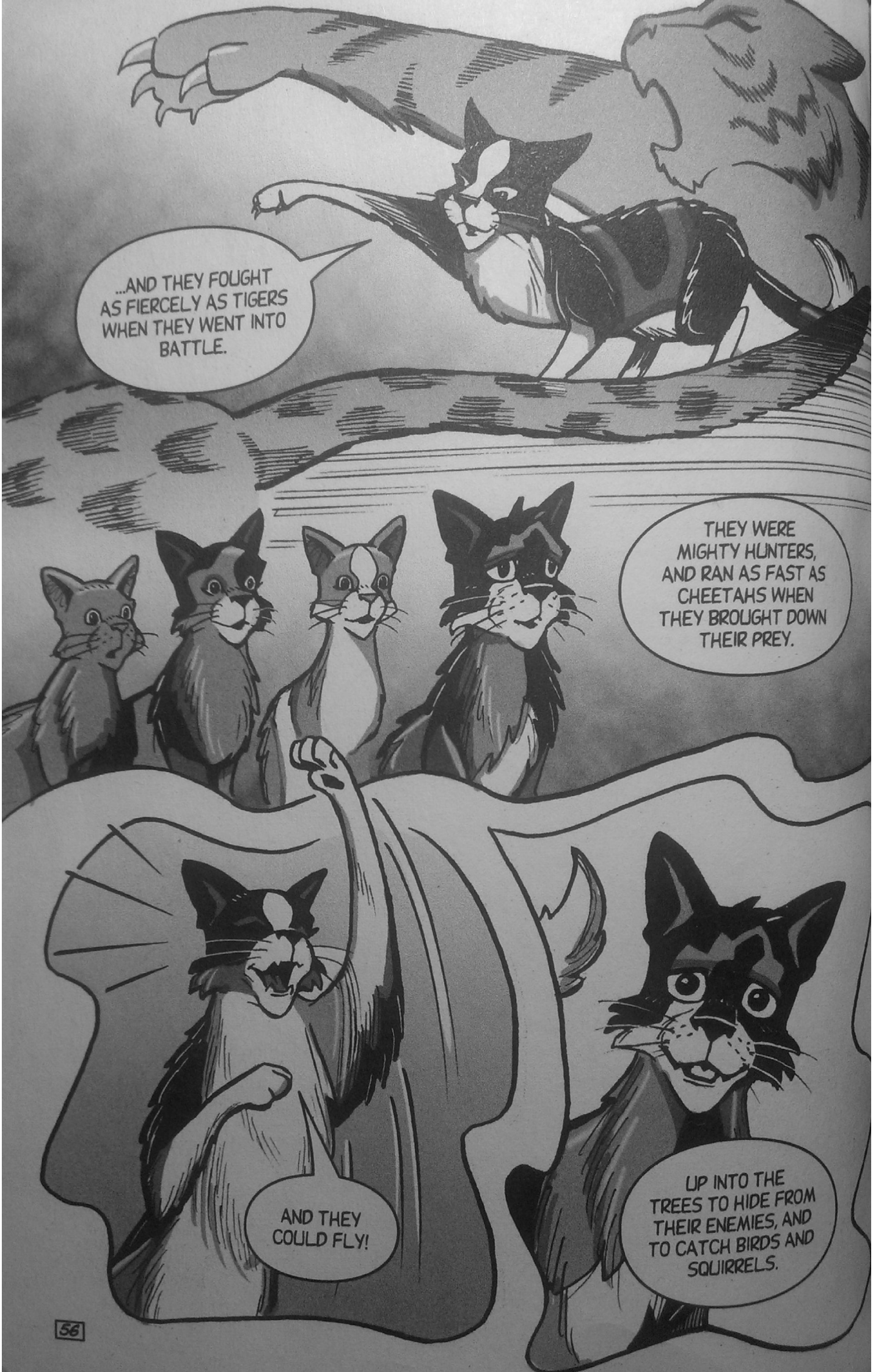
LICHENFUR...
THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

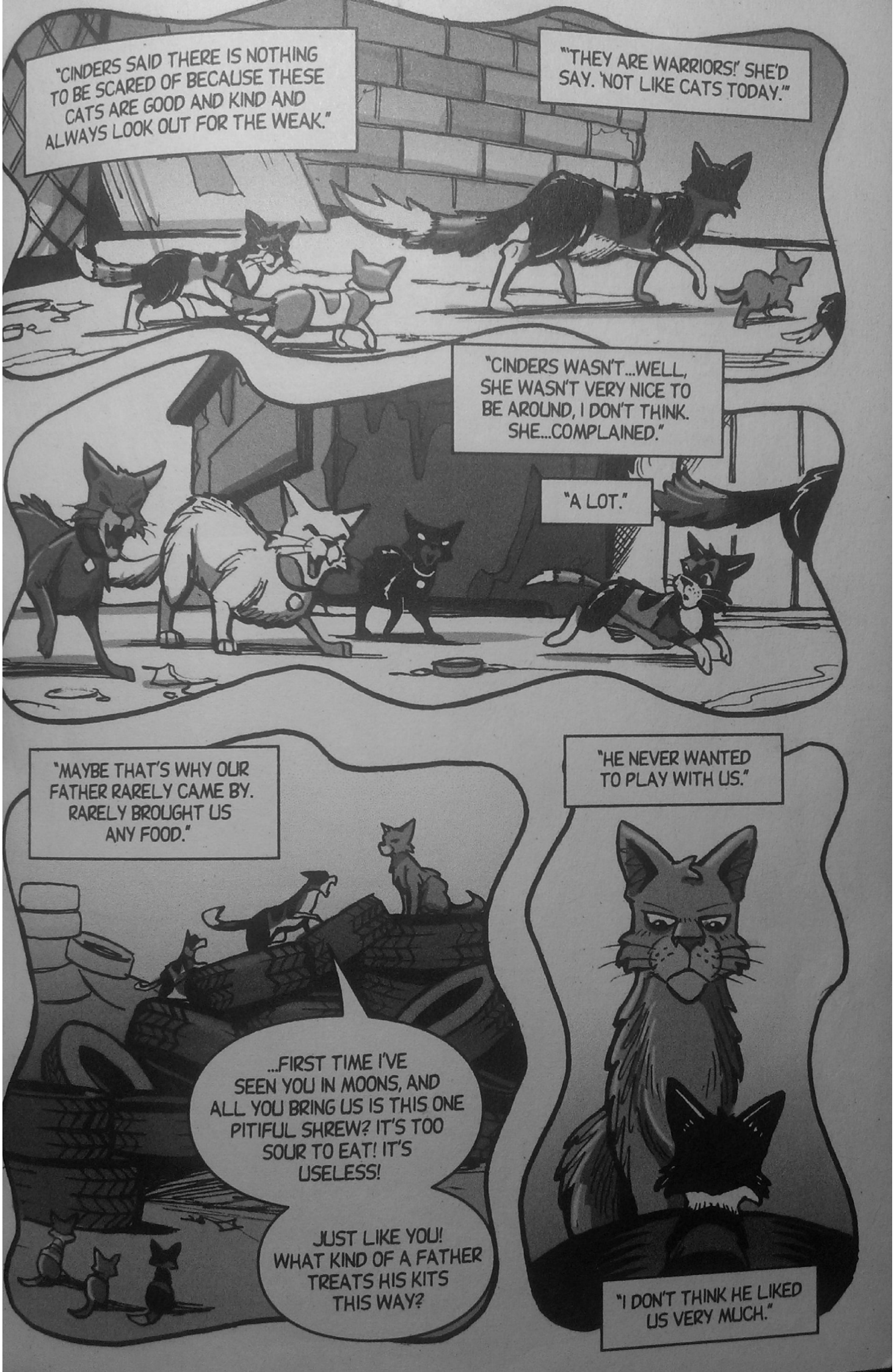

AH, IT WAS NOTHING.
THEY MAY BE PESTS...BUT I'VE KIND OF GOTTEN USED TO HAVING THEM AROUND.

BUT WE COULD HAVE HELPED, MAMA!
NO, YOU COULD NOT HAVE HELPED. YOU'RE ALL STILL TOO SMALL.
BUT--
NO, NO "BUTS." IF YOU PULL A STUNT LIKE THAT AGAIN, YOU'LL GET NOTHING BUT MOUSE TAILS FOR TWO DAYS.
LEAFSTAR... I...
I'M SO, SO SORRY. I JUST...
I JUST GOT SO SCARED.
AND I DIDN'T KNOW. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. HOW TO HELP.
WILL YOU...
ARE YOU GOING TO TELL THE REST OF THE CLAN THAT IT WAS MY FAULT THE FOXES CAME?
...NO. NO, THERE'D BE NO POINT. SOL...
LISTEN, MAYBE CLAN LIFE JUST ISN'T RIGHT FOR YOU. HUNTING AND FIGHTING ARE AT THE CENTER OF BEING A CLAN WARRIOR.
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT IF YOU'RE JUST NOT BORN WITH THE RIGHT INSTINCTS.
53

BUT--BUT, NO, NO, I HAVE TO BE A WARRIOR!
IT'S ALL I'VE EVER WANTED!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
DID YOU KNOW ABOUT SKYCLAN BEFORE WE MET YOU?
I'VE KNOWN ABOUT SKYCLAN SINCE BEFORE I OPENED MY EYES.
"MY EARLY LIFE... WASN'T EASY."
"MY MOTHER WAS CALLED CINDERS. SHE...
SHE...SHE DIDN'T GIVE US NAMES."
54

"I'M NOT SURE CINDER REALLY WANTED TO HAVE KITS. AND SHE DIDN'T HUNT VERY WELL."
QUIET, NOW. YOU HAVE TO BE QUIET SO YOU CAN LISTEN.
"BUT SHE TOLD US STORIES. TO GET US TO BEHAVE."
"SHE'D TELL US STORIES TO CHEER US UP. THEY WERE ALL ABOUT A CLAN OF CATS FROM LONG AGO..."
"CATS THAT WERE HEROIC... AND BRAVE...AND HONORABLE."
THESE CATS WERE ALL STRONG AND BEAUTIFUL...AND THEY CAME DOWN ON CLOUDS, LIKE SKY WARRIORS.
THEY GREW AS BIG AS LIONS WHEN THEY WERE ANGRY...


...AND THEY FOUGHT AS FIERCELY AS TIGERS WHEN THEY WENT INTO BATTLE.
THEY WERE MIGHTY HUNTERS, AND RAN AS FAST AS CHEETAHS WHEN THEY BROUGHT DOWN THEIR PREY.
AND THEY COULD FLY!
UP INTO THE TREES TO HIDE FROM THEIR ENEMIES, AND TO CATCH BIRDS AND SQUIRRELS.


"CINDERS SAID THERE IS NOTHING TO BE SCARED OF BECAUSE THESE CATS ARE GOOD AND KIND AND ALWAYS LOOK OUT FOR THE WEAK."
"'THEY ARE WARRIORS!' SHE'D SAY. 'NOT LIKE CATS TODAY.'"
"CINDERS WASN'T...WELL, SHE WASN'T VERY NICE TO BE AROUND, I DON'T THINK. SHE...COMPLAINED."
"A LOT."
"MAYBE THAT'S WHY OUR FATHER RARELY CAME BY. RARELY BROUGHT US ANY FOOD."
...FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN YOU IN MOONS, AND ALL YOU BRING US IS THIS ONE PITIFUL SHREW? IT'S TOO SOUR TO EAT! IT'S USELESS!
JUST LIKE YOU! WHAT KIND OF A FATHER TREATS HIS KITS THIS WAY?
"HE NEVER WANTED TO PLAY WITH US."
"I DON'T THINK HE LIKED US VERY MUCH."

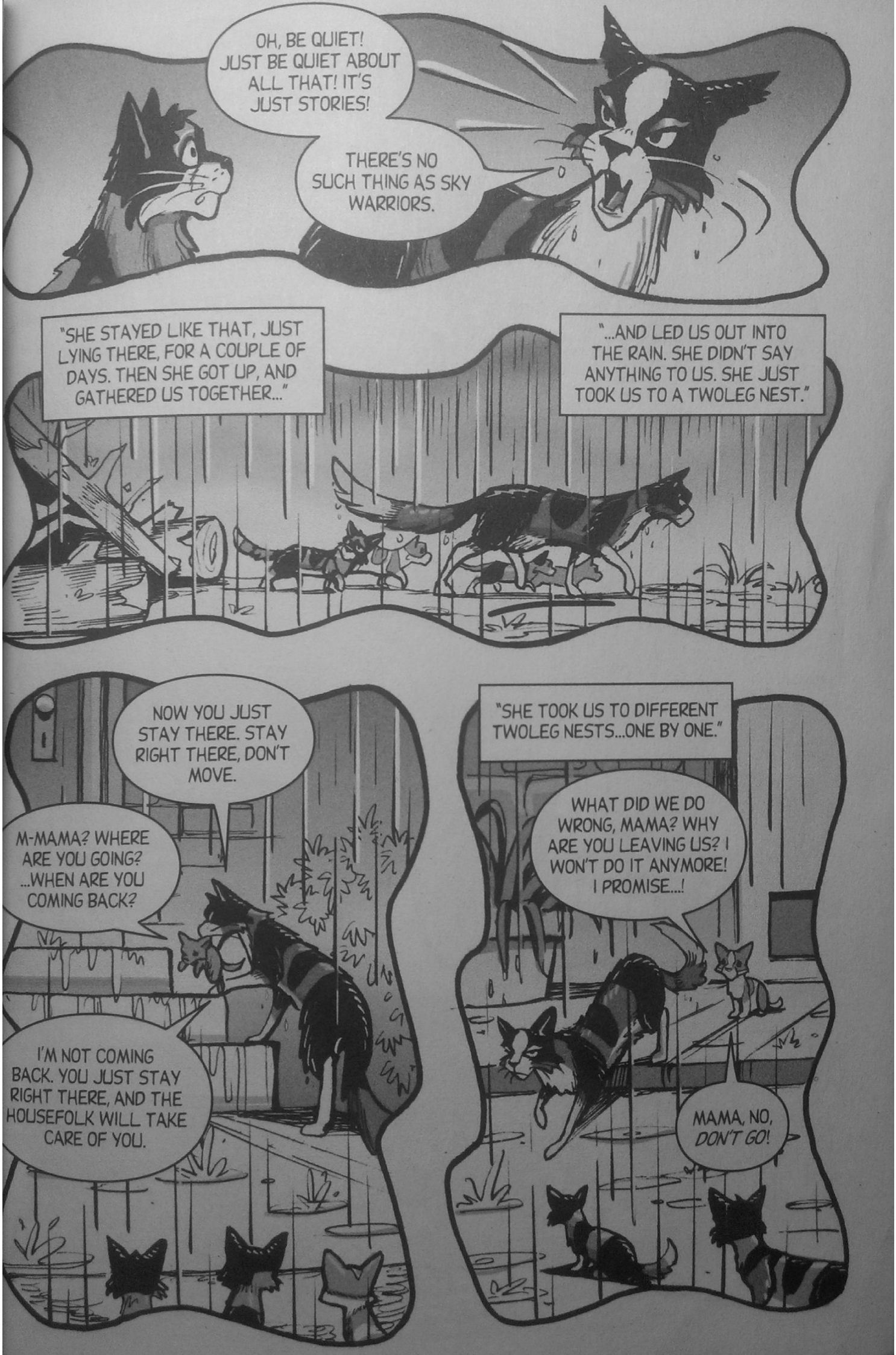
LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING. CATS DIDN'T ALWAYS TREAT EACH OTHER THE WAY YOUR FATHER TREATS US.
CATS USED TO BE WARRIORS. NOBLE AND STRONG. AND GOOD. NOT LIKE HIM.
"CINDERS DIDN'T LIKE TWOLEGS ANY MORE THAN SHE LIKED OTHER CATS..."
"...AND ONE TIME, WE WERE REALLY HUNGRY, AND ATE SOME FOOD A TWOLEG PUT OUTSIDE ITS NEST."
"CINDERS YELLED AT US, TOLD US TO GET AWAY FROM THERE."
"I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY! I WAS HUNTING--JUST LIKE A WARRIOR CAT!"
"BUT SHE SAID, 'THAT'S NOT HUNTING. YOU SHOULD CATCH WILD FOOD, NOT EAT THAT BROWN SLOP.'"

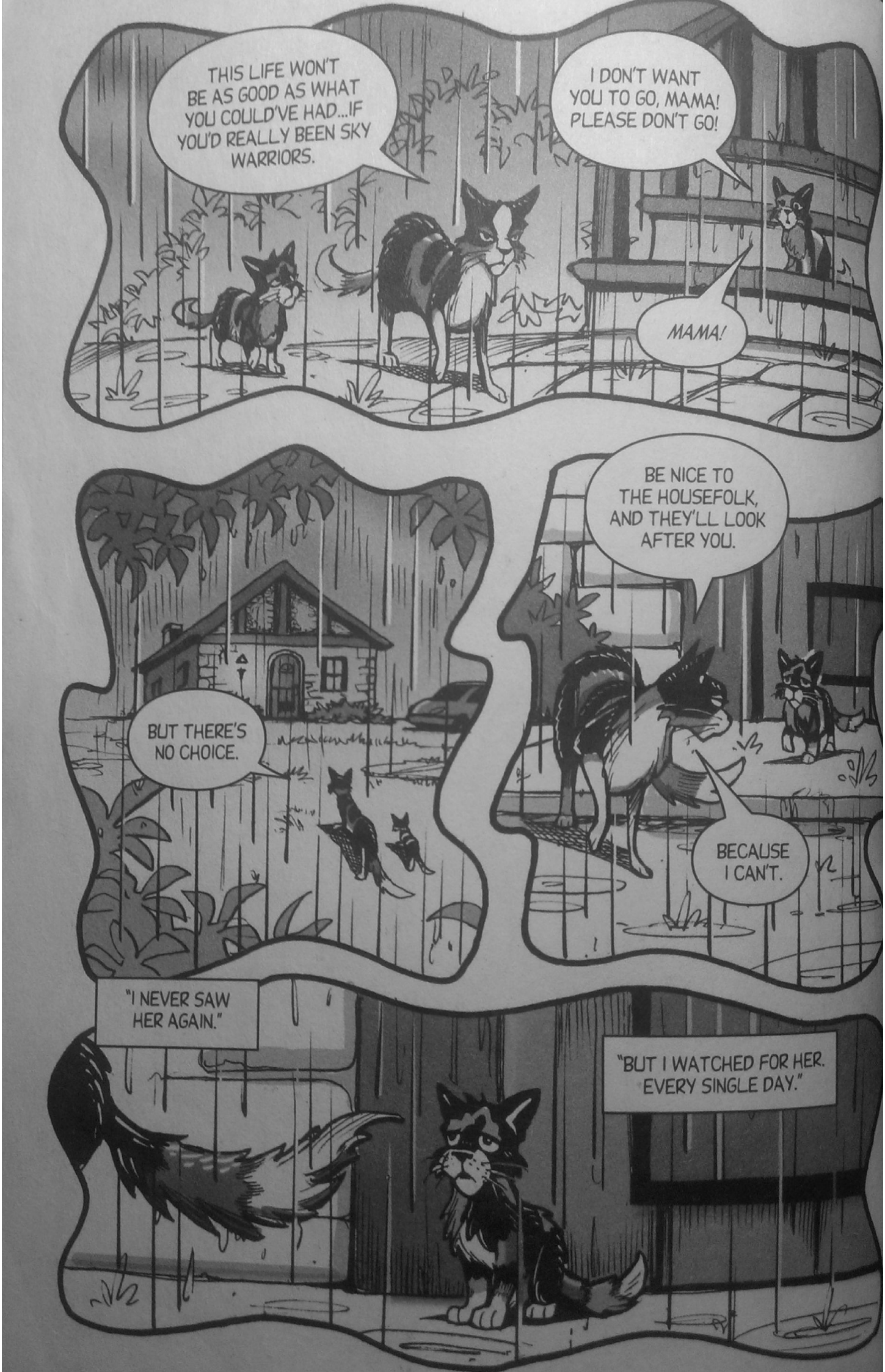
YOU'LL EAT WHEN WE'VE FOUND SOMEWHERE OUT OF THE RAIN.
NOW MOVE YOUR TAILS!
MAMA, WHEN I GET BIGGER, I'M GONNA BE A WARRIOR. JUST LIKE THE CATS FROM THE SKY.
I'LL CATCH US ALL THE PREY WE CAN EAT!
WELL.
WON'T THAT BE SOMETHING.
"WE LOOKED AND LOOKED FOR SOMEPLACE TO TAKE SHELTER..."

"...BUT WITH NO FRIENDS..."
"...AND NO TWOLEGS..."
"...WE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH LUCK."
QUIT WASTING TIME, TRYING TO HELP!
BUT MAMA-
YOU'RE TOO SMALL TO BE ANY USE. JUST COME ON!

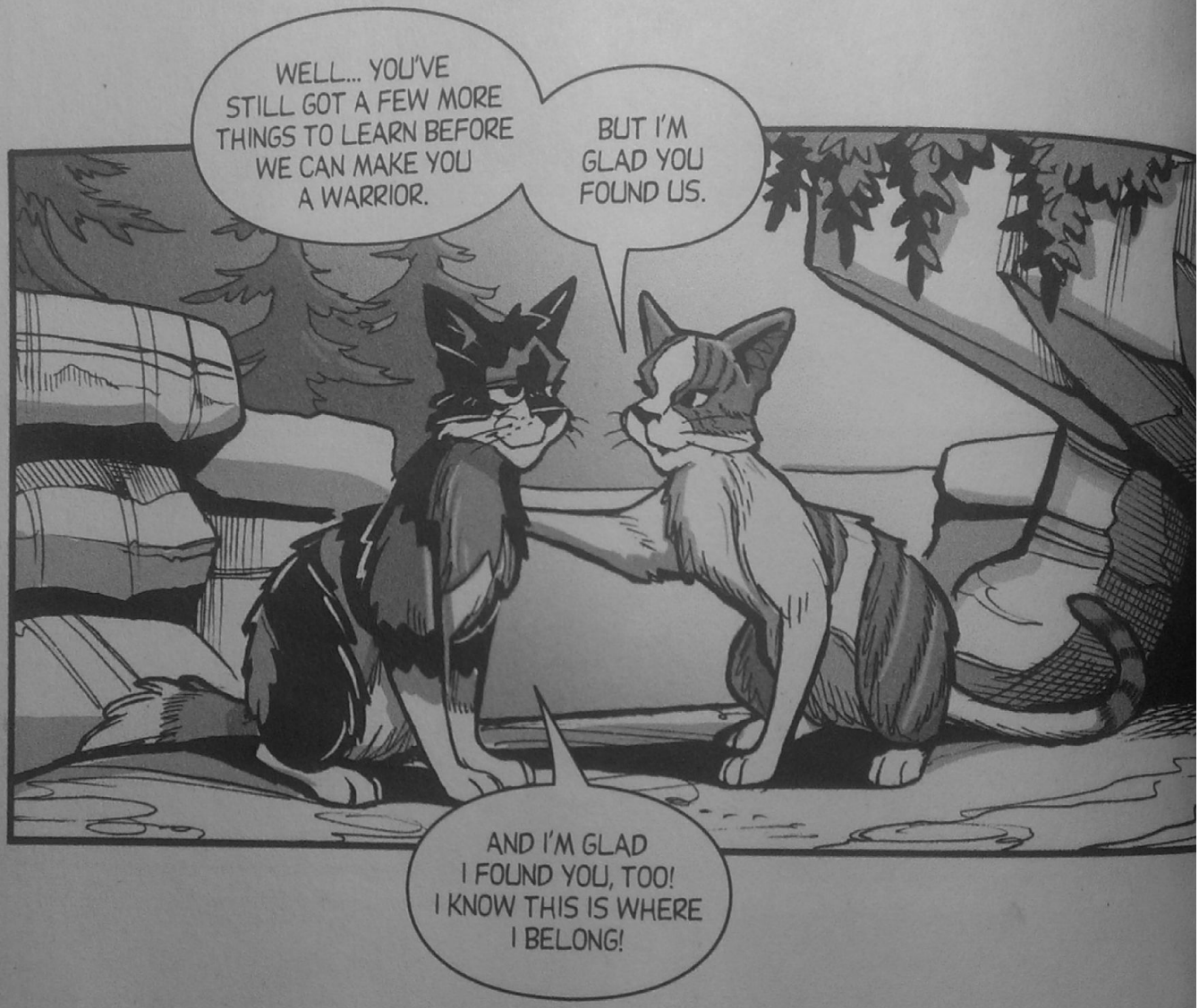
WELL, IT'S JUST NEVER GOING TO QUIT RAINING, IS IT? WE'LL ALL CATCH OUR DEATH BEFORE IT'S OVER.
NOT AS IF ANYBODY WOULD KNOW WE WERE GONE ANYWAY.
OOH--MAMA? I KNOW WHAT WOULD CHEER US UP!
TELL US A STORY ABOUT THE SKY WARRIORS!
YOU CAN FORGET ABOUT THE SKY WARRIORS. THEY'RE NOT HERE NOW, ARE THEY? NO ONE IS.
NO ONE CAN HELP US.
"FINALLY WE FOUND SOME SHELTER IN A LOG PILE. IT WAS PRETTY DRAFTY, BUT IT LET US STOP AND REST."
"AND WE ALL GOT EXCITED WHEN OUR FATHER SHOWED UP."
"THOUGH I GUESS WE SHOULD'VE KNOWN BETTER."
CINDERS.
WELL. LOOK WHO FINALLY SHOWS HIS FACE. AND FOODLESS AGAIN, NOT THAT I'M SURPRISED.

CINDERS...I'M GOING AWAY. I'VE MET ANOTHER MATE...ONE WHO DOESN'T COMPLAIN ALL THE TIME.
SHE AND I ARE GOING SOMEPLACE ELSE. SOMEWHERE WITH MORE PREY.
OH, SO THAT'S HOW IT IS, IS IT? YOU GET ME WITH A LITTER OF KITS, AND NOW YOU'RE JUST ABANDONING US?
GOOD-BYE, CINDERS.
WHAT AM I GOING TO DO NOW? NO MATE...NO ONE TO HELP ME RAISE MY KITS...
WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE SUCH ROTTEN TREATMENT?
WHY DO THINGS LIKE THIS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO ME?
MAMA...? MAMA, IF YOU'LL TELL ME WHAT I CAN DO TO HELP, I'LL DO IT. WE'RE ALL HUNGRY... MAYBE I CAN FIND SOME FOOD...?
IT'S POINTLESS. EVERYTHING'S POINTLESS. I CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS. I JUST CAN'T.
MAMA...JUST HOLD ON...PLEASE! JUST HOLD ON, AND I'LL GET BIGGER, I PROMISE I WILL!
AND YOU CAN BE SAFE...AND WE'LL HAVE ENOUGH FOOD... *PLEASE*, MAMA...!
I'LL GET BIG ENOUGH, AND I'LL BE A SKY WARRIOR...
...AND I'LL BE FAST AND FIERCE...AND I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU. I'LL TAKE CARE OF ALL OF US.

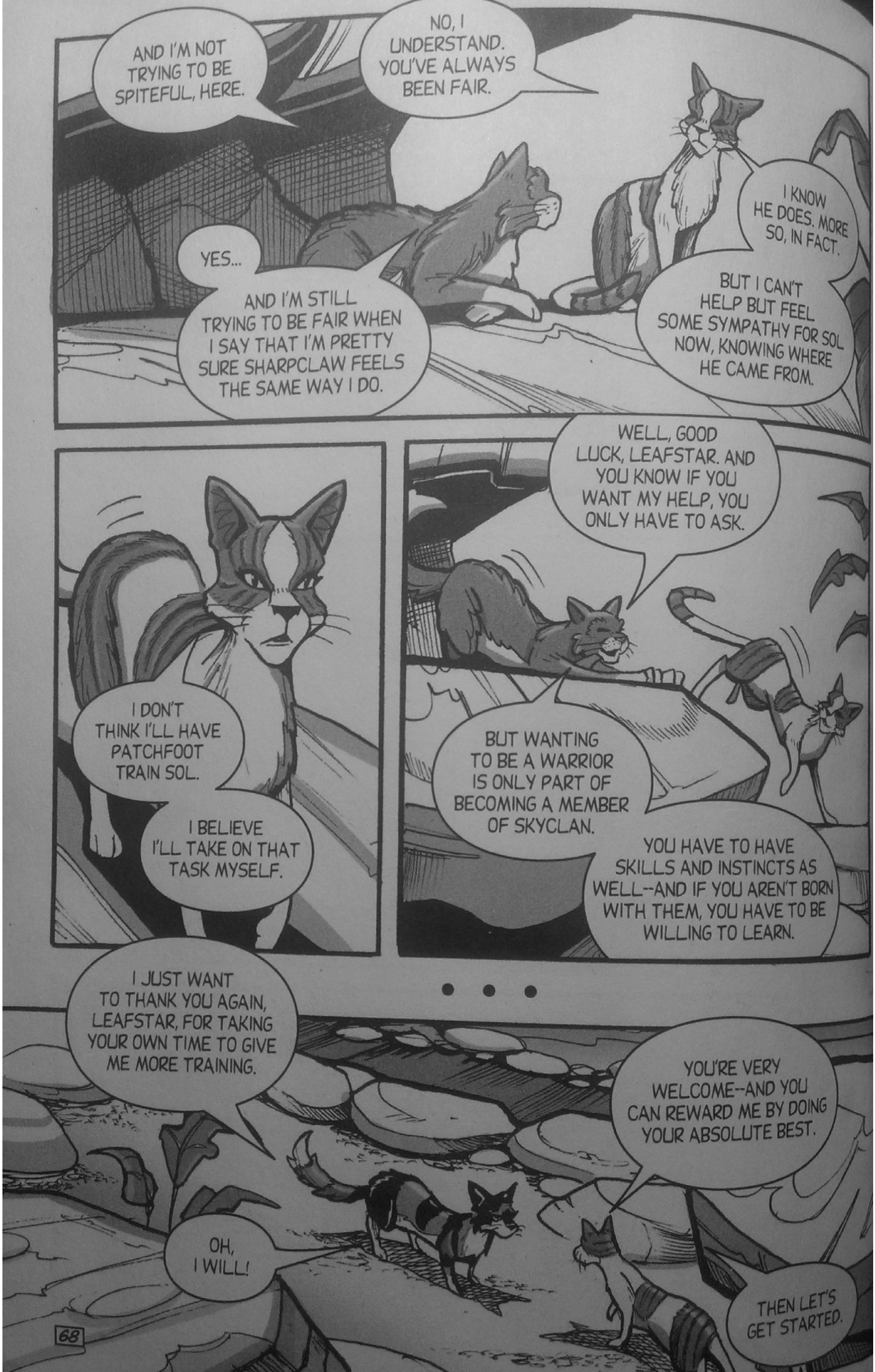

OH, BE QUIET! JUST BE QUIET ABOUT ALL THAT! IT'S JUST STORIES!
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS SKY WARRIORS.
"SHE STAYED LIKE THAT, JUST LYING THERE, FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS. THEN SHE GOT UP, AND GATHERED US TOGETHER..."
"...AND LED US OUT INTO THE RAIN. SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO US. SHE JUST TOOK US TO A TWOLEG NEST."
NOW YOU JUST STAY THERE. STAY RIGHT THERE, DON'T MOVE.
M-MAMA? WHERE ARE YOU GOING? ...WHEN ARE YOU COMING BACK?
I'M NOT COMING BACK. YOU JUST STAY RIGHT THERE, AND THE HOUSEFOLK WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.
"SHE TOOK US TO DIFFERENT TWOLEG NESTS...ONE BY ONE."
WHAT DID WE DO WRONG, MAMA? WHY ARE YOU LEAVING US? I WON'T DO IT ANYMORE! I PROMISE...!
MAMA, NO, *DON'T GO!*

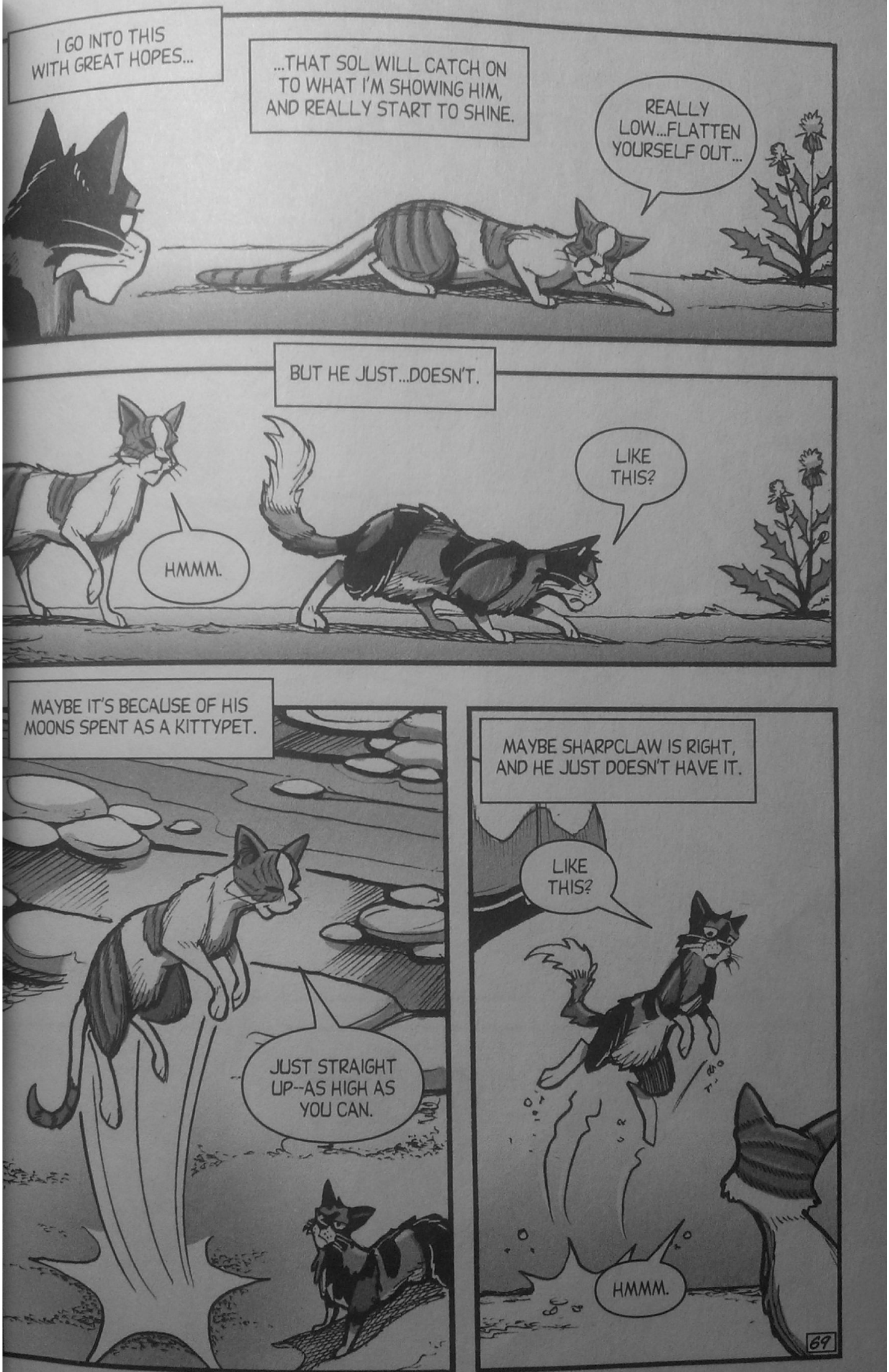

THIS LIFE WON'T BE AS GOOD AS WHAT YOU COULD'VE HAD...IF YOU'D REALLY BEEN SKY WARRIORS.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO GO, MAMA! PLEASE DON'T GO!
MAMA!
BE NICE TO THE HOUSEFOLK, AND THEY'LL LOOK AFTER YOU.
BUT THERE'S NO CHOICE.
BECAUSE I CAN'T.
"I NEVER SAW HER AGAIN."
"BUT I WATCHED FOR HER. EVERY SINGLE DAY."

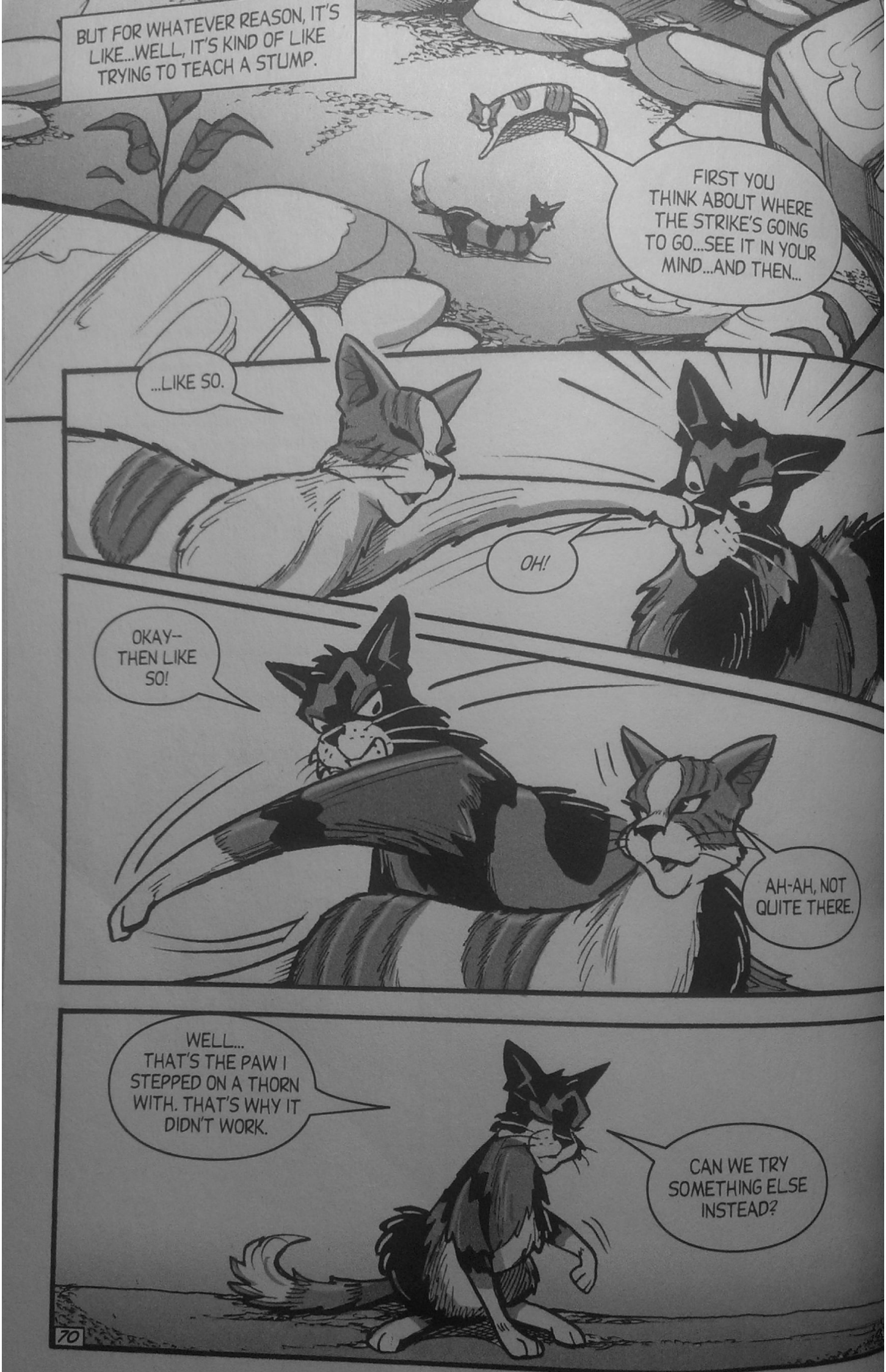
"WISHING OVER AND OVER THAT I COULD'VE BEEN A SKY WARRIOR...BECAUSE THEN SHE..."
"...MIGHT'VE STAYED..."
THE OLD ONE WHO TOOK ME IN WAS KIND, AND KEPT ME WELL-FED.
BUT WHEN YOU SHOWED UP, AND I FOUND OUT THE CLAN HAD RETURNED... I JUST...COULDN'T BELIEVE IT.
SKYCLAN WAS REAL. I'D FINALLY GET TO BE A PART OF IT!
OKAY, SO MAYBE THE CATS HERE DON'T ACTUALLY FLY OR TURN INTO LIONS...
...BUT THEY ARE BRAVE, AND HONORABLE, AND ALWAYS LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER. YOU SEE? MY WISH HAS COME TRUE!
WHEREVER CINDERS IS...
SHE MUST BE SO PROUD AND HAPPY TO KNOW THAT I'VE BECOME A SKYCLAN WARRIOR!
OH, SOL...
I'M SO SORRY THAT YOU LOST YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS LIKE THAT.
BUT... BUT YOU UNDERSTAND NOW?
YOU KNOW WHY BEING A WARRIOR IS SO IMPORTANT TO ME?
65

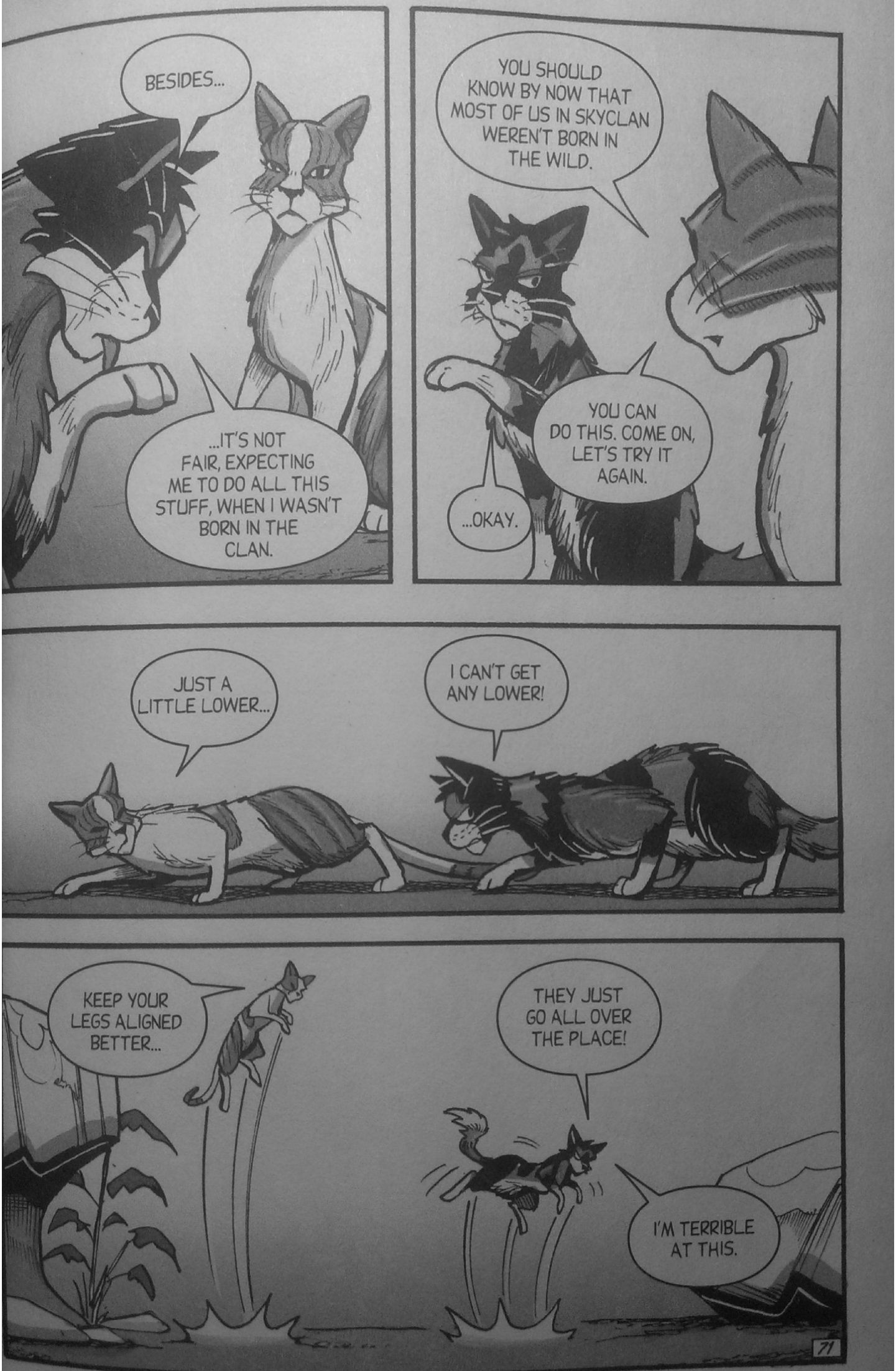

WELL... YOU'VE STILL GOT A FEW MORE THINGS TO LEARN BEFORE WE CAN MAKE YOU A WARRIOR.
BUT I'M GLAD YOU FOUND US.
AND I'M GLAD I FOUND YOU, TOO! I KNOW THIS IS WHERE I BELONG!

SOL GAVE ME A LOT OF INFORMATION TO TAKE IN.
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT IT A GREAT DEAL.
AND I NEED SOME PERSPECTIVE.
SO...WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON SOL THESE DAYS?
WELL...I WAS PRETTY HORRIFIED ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE FOX ATTACK.
SOL DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE MUCH IN THE WAY OF COURAGE. OR FIGHTING TACTICS.
PLUS, JUST BEING HONEST, HE'S LAZY. AND A BIT TOO CLEVER. HE ALWAYS THINKS OF REASONS NOT TO DO SOMETHING.
67

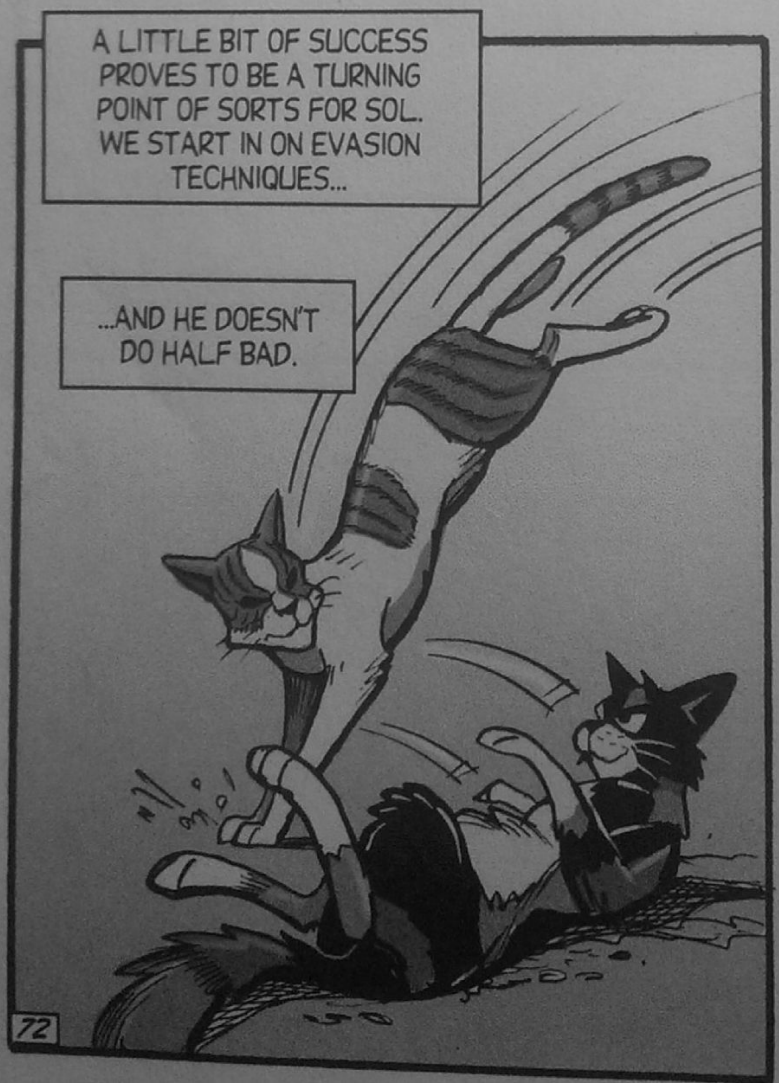

AND I'M NOT TRYING TO BE SPITEFUL, HERE.
NO, I UNDERSTAND. YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN FAIR.
I KNOW HE DOES. MORE SO, IN FACT.
BUT I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL SOME SYMPATHY FOR SOL NOW, KNOWING WHERE HE CAME FROM.
YES...
AND I'M STILL TRYING TO BE FAIR WHEN I SAY THAT I'M PRETTY SURE SHARPCLAW FEELS THE SAME WAY I DO.
WELL, GOOD LUCK, LEAFSTAR. AND YOU KNOW IF YOU WANT MY HELP, YOU ONLY HAVE TO ASK.
I DON'T THINK I'LL HAVE PATCHFOOT TRAIN SOL.
I BELIEVE I'LL TAKE ON THAT TASK MYSELF.
BUT WANTING TO BE A WARRIOR IS ONLY PART OF BECOMING A MEMBER OF SKYCLAN.
YOU HAVE TO HAVE SKILLS AND INSTINCTS AS WELL--AND IF YOU AREN'T BORN WITH THEM, YOU HAVE TO BE WILLING TO LEARN.
I JUST WANT TO THANK YOU AGAIN, LEAFSTAR, FOR TAKING YOUR OWN TIME TO GIVE ME MORE TRAINING.
YOU'RE VERY WELCOME--AND YOU CAN REWARD ME BY DOING YOUR ABSOLUTE BEST.
OH, I WILL!
THEN LET'S GET STARTED.


I GO INTO THIS WITH GREAT HOPES...
...THAT SOL WILL CATCH ON TO WHAT I'M SHOWING HIM, AND REALLY START TO SHINE.
REALLY LOW...FLATTEN YOURSELF OUT...
BUT HE JUST...DOESN'T.
LIKE THIS?
HMMM.
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE OF HIS MOONS SPENT AS A KITTYPET.
JUST STRAIGHT UP--AS HIGH AS YOU CAN.
MAYBE SHARPCLAW IS RIGHT, AND HE JUST DOESN'T HAVE IT.
LIKE THIS?
HMMM.
69

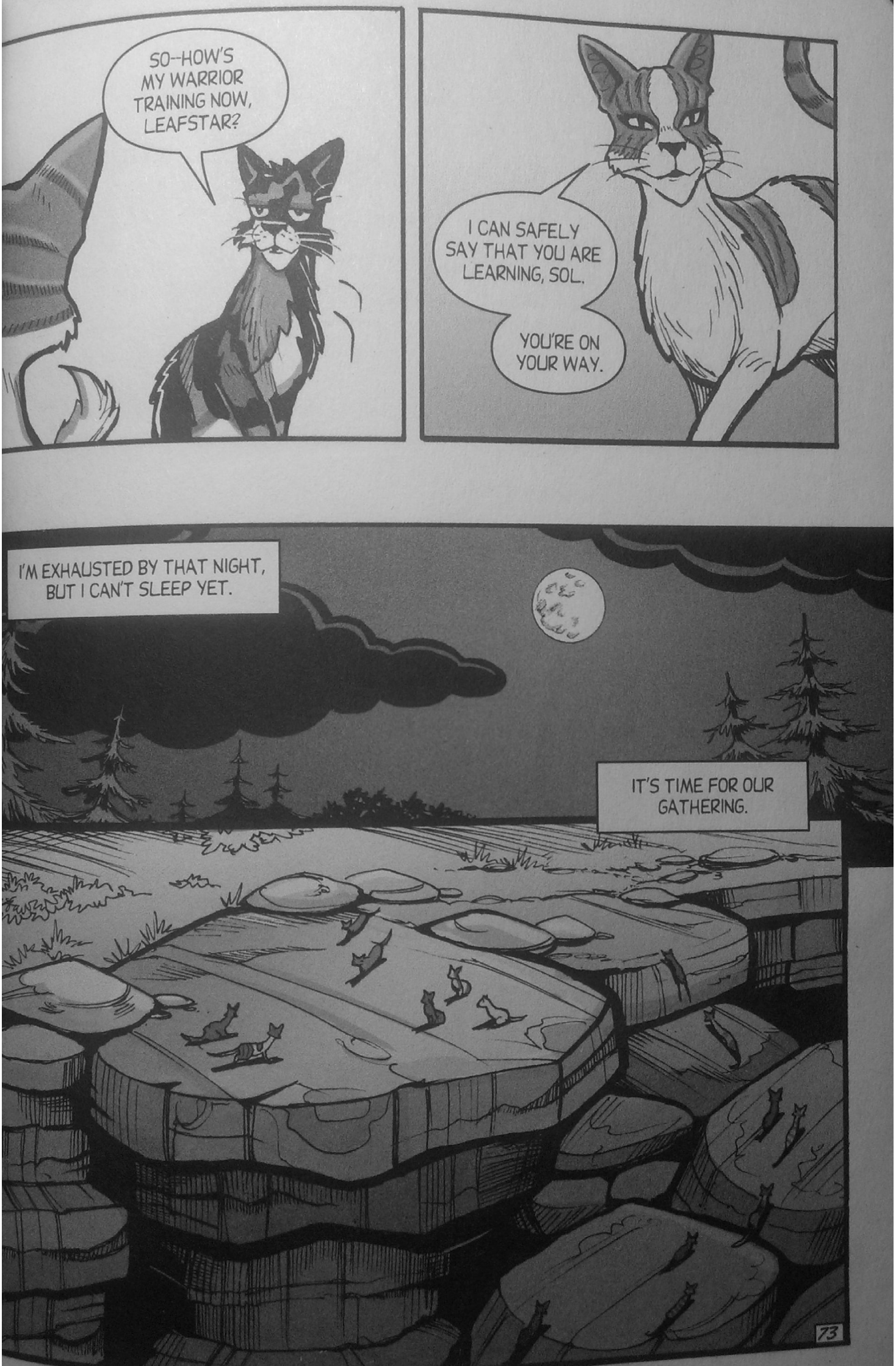

BUT FOR WHATEVER REASON, IT'S LIKE...WELL, IT'S KIND OF LIKE TRYING TO TEACH A STUMP.
FIRST YOU THINK ABOUT WHERE THE STRIKE'S GOING TO GO...SEE IT IN YOUR MIND...AND THEN...
...LIKE SO.
OH!
OKAY-- THEN LIKE SO!
AH-AH, NOT QUITE THERE.
WELL... THAT'S THE PAW I STEPPED ON A THORN WITH. THAT'S WHY IT DIDN'T WORK.
CAN WE TRY SOMETHING ELSE INSTEAD?

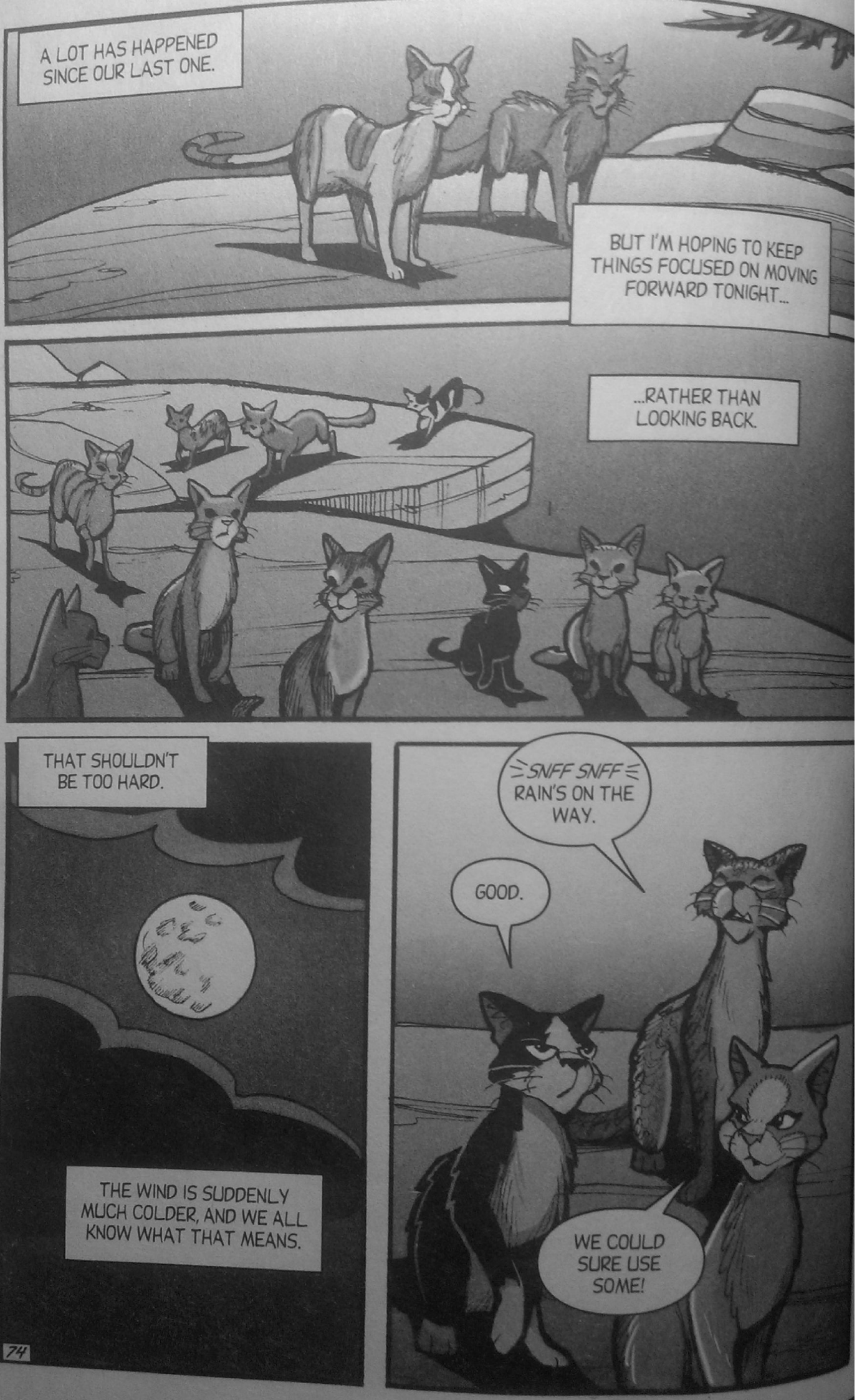

BESIDES...
...IT'S NOT FAIR, EXPECTING ME TO DO ALL THIS STUFF, WHEN I WASN'T BORN IN THE CLAN.
YOU SHOULD KNOW BY NOW THAT MOST OF US IN SKYCLAN WEREN'T BORN IN THE WILD.
YOU CAN DO THIS. COME ON, LET'S TRY IT AGAIN.
...OKAY.
JUST A LITTLE LOWER...
I CAN'T GET ANY LOWER!
KEEP YOUR LEGS ALIGNED BETTER...
THEY JUST GO ALL OVER THE PLACE!
I'M TERRIBLE AT THIS.
71

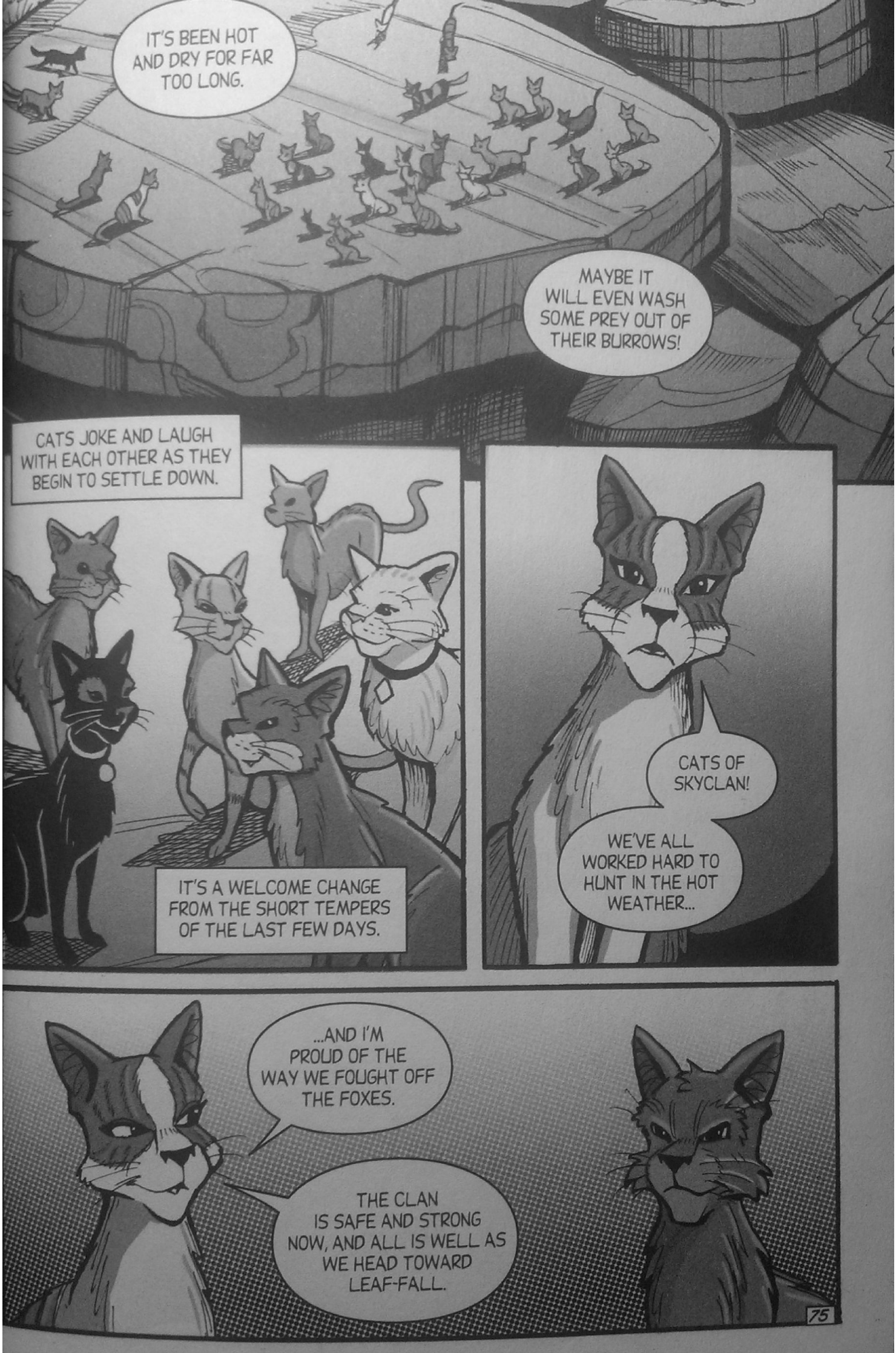
I'M ALMOST READY TO AGREE WITH SOL, THAT HE IS TERRIBLE AT THIS...
...WHEN HE SURPRISES ME. SURPRISES HIMSELF, TOO.
I DID IT!
HA! I DID IT! I DID IT!


A LITTLE BIT OF SUCCESS PROVES TO BE A TURNING POINT OF SORTS FOR SOL. WE START IN ON EVASION TECHNIQUES...
...AND HE DOESN'T DO HALF BAD.

THEN WE TRY THE SAME THING I TAUGHT MY KITS... SNEAKING UP ON SOMETHING SOUNDLESSLY...
...AND AGAIN, HE'S SURPRISINGLY DECENT AT IT.


SO--HOW'S MY WARRIOR TRAINING NOW, LEAFSTAR?
I CAN SAFELY SAY THAT YOU ARE LEARNING, SOL.
YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY.
I'M EXHAUSTED BY THAT NIGHT, BUT I CAN'T SLEEP YET.
IT'S TIME FOR OUR GATHERING.
73


A LOT HAS HAPPENED SINCE OUR LAST ONE.
BUT I'M HOPING TO KEEP THINGS FOCUSED ON MOVING FORWARD TONIGHT...
...RATHER THAN LOOKING BACK.
THAT SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD.
THE WIND IS SUDDENLY MUCH COLDER, AND WE ALL KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.
=SNFF SNFF= RAIN'S ON THE WAY.
GOOD.
WE COULD SURE USE SOME!


IT'S BEEN HOT AND DRY FOR FAR TOO LONG.
MAYBE IT WILL EVEN WASH SOME PREY OUT OF THEIR BURROWS!
CATS JOKE AND LAUGH WITH EACH OTHER AS THEY BEGIN TO SETTLE DOWN.
IT'S A WELCOME CHANGE FROM THE SHORT TEMPERS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS.
CATS OF SKYCLAN!
WE'VE ALL WORKED HARD TO HUNT IN THE HOT WEATHER...
...AND I'M PROUD OF THE WAY WE FOUGHT OFF THE FOXES.
THE CLAN IS SAFE AND STRONG NOW, AND ALL IS WELL AS WE HEAD TOWARD LEAF-FALL.

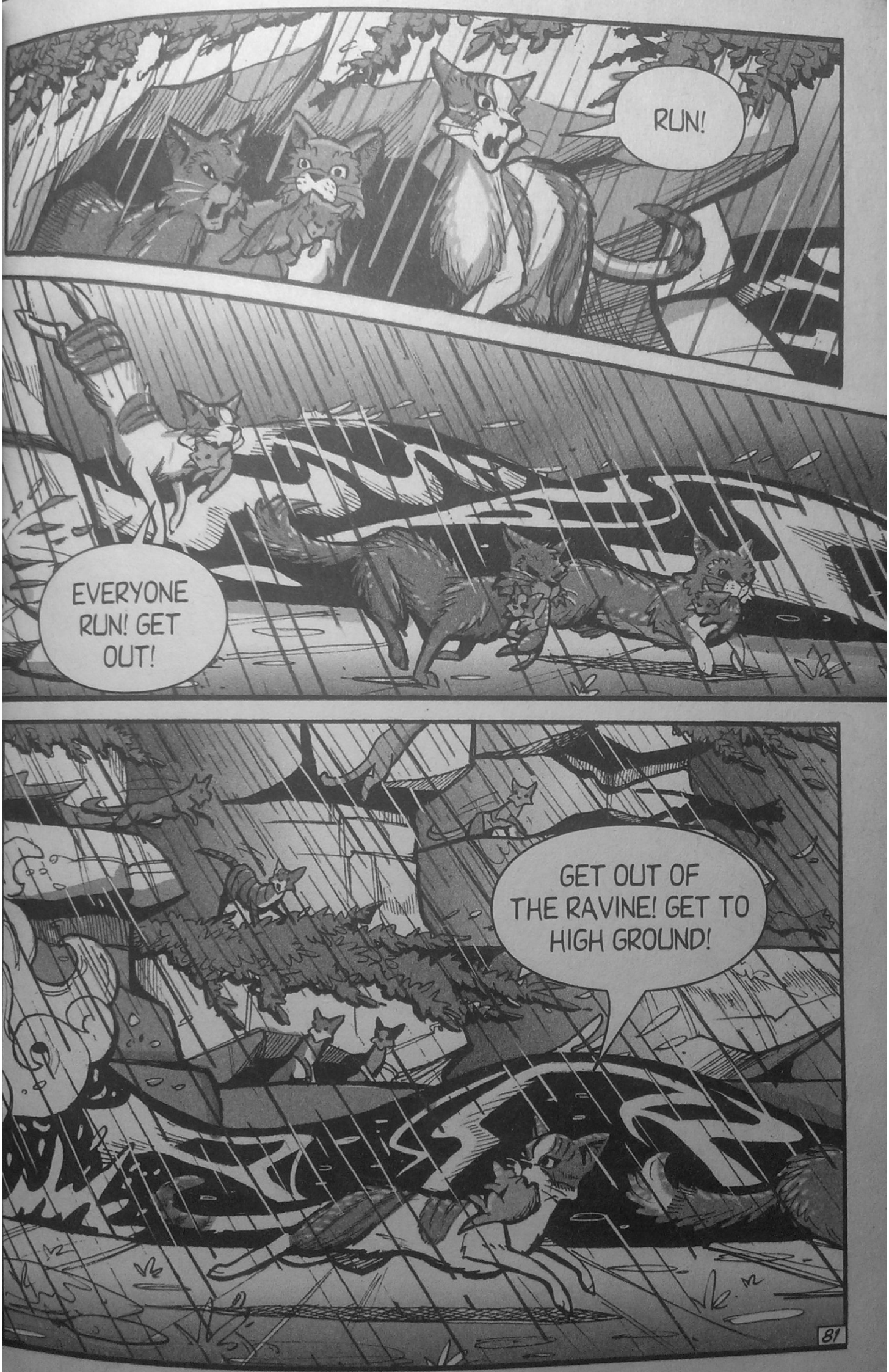
PLUS YOU'VE GOT A NEW WARRIOR AMONG YOU NOW!
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, LEAFSTAR?
I'M READY TO BECOME A FULL WARRIOR OF SKYCLAN!
SOL...THIS IS NEITHER THE TIME NOR THE PLACE FOR THIS, BUT...
I'M AFRAID THAT'S JUST NOT HOW IT WORKS.
WHEN YOU COMPLETE YOUR TRAINING, YOU'LL BE ASSESSED...
AND THEN GIVEN A WARRIOR NAME.
BUT...BUT YOU SAID I WAS LEARNING!
TODAY, IT WAS JUST TODAY, YOU TOLD ME THAT!
SOL...
HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME? HOW COULD YOU HUMILIATE ME IN FRONT OF ALL MY CLANMATES?

SOL, WAIT! COME BACK HERE!
SOL!
WHY DO THINGS LIKE THIS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO ME?
KRA-K-RAK
A-
BOOM
WHOOSH
LEAFSTAR!
BACK TO YOUR DENS!
EVERYONE BACK TO YOUR DENS NOW!
MAMA! MAMA! WHAT WAS THAT NOISE?
IT WAS SO LOUD! IT HURT MY EARS!
IS IT MORE FOXES?
77

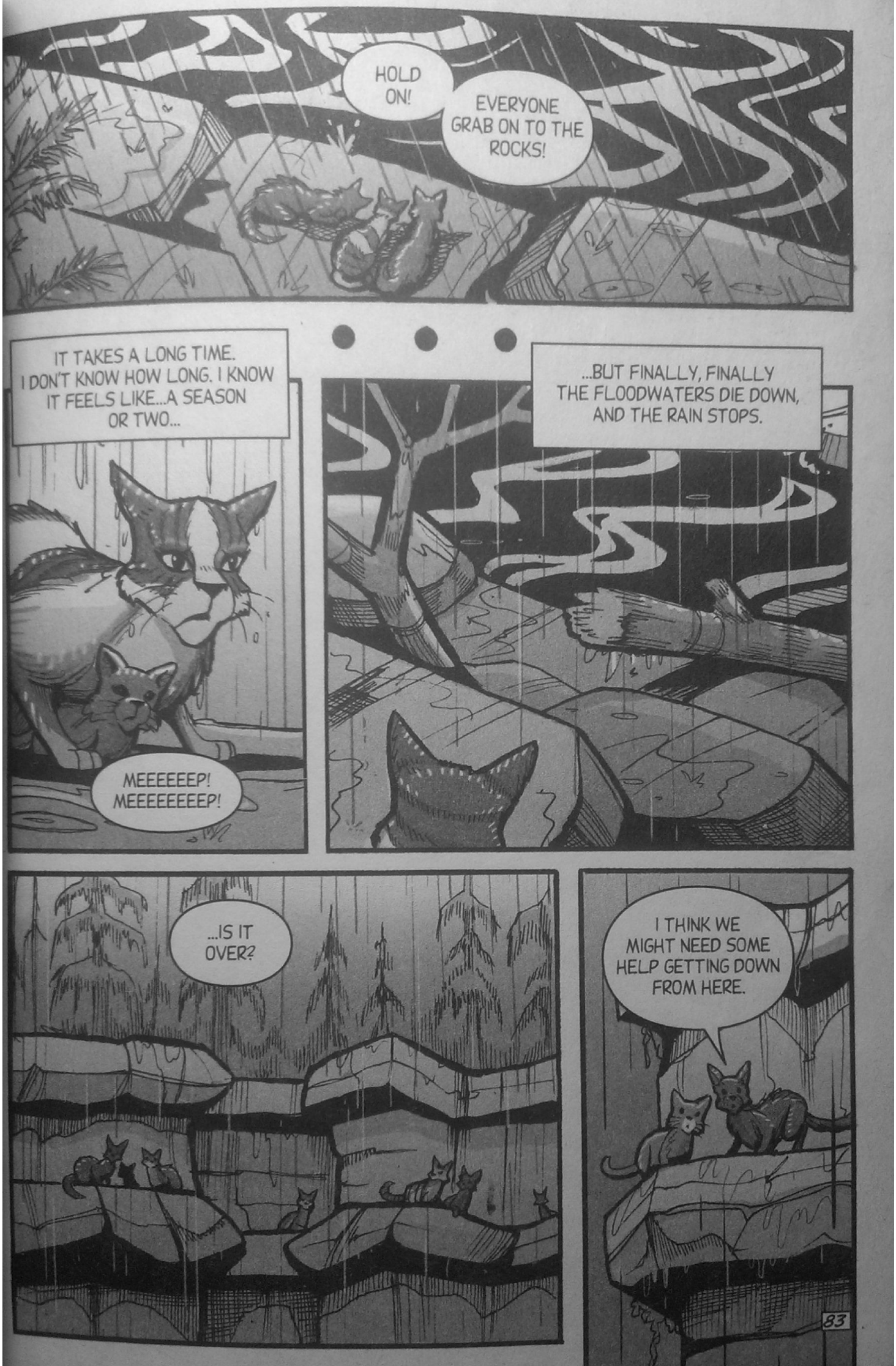
HUSH, LITTLE ONES, HUSH...IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S JUST A STORM.
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
BUT I'M SCARED THAT IT MIGHT NOT BE "JUST A STORM."
I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER SEEN RAIN THIS HARD BEFORE.
YOU'RE HERE! THANK STARCLAN YOU'RE ALL OKAY!
BILLYSTORM! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
WON'T YOUR HOUSEFOLK BE SCARED?
I COULDN'T LEAVE YOU ON YOUR OWN. NOT IN SUCH A BAD STORM.
EASIER TO KEEP THE KITS SAFE WITH BOTH OF US HERE.
I...
THANK YOU.
78

LEAFSTAR? CAN I COME IN?
WE MIGHT HAVE TO CONSIDER EVACUATING THE LOWER DENS.
YOU THINK IT'S THAT SERIOUS?
THERE ARE ALREADY SOME REALLY BIG PUDDLES FORMING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GORGE.
WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIT INTO THE WARRIORS' DENS FOR THE NIGHT, THOUGH.
WE ALL FEEL IT BEFORE WE HEAR IT. A RUMBLING SOUND, DEEPER AND MORE AWFUL THAN ANY THUNDER.
RRUUMBLE
MAMA, MAMA, WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

WHAT IS IT, MAMA?
STARCLAN HELP US...

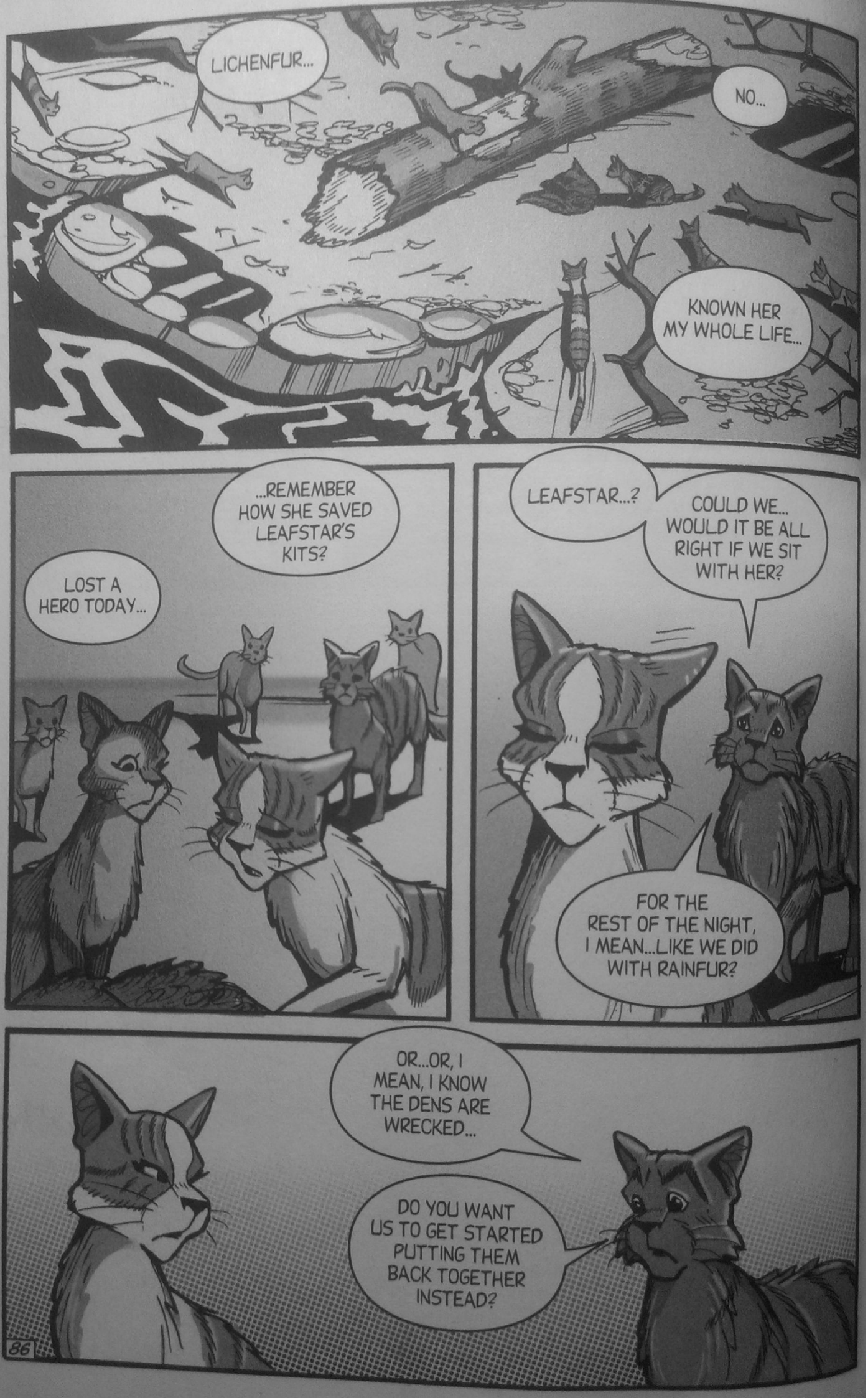

RUN!
EVERYONE RUN! GET OUT!
GET OUT OF THE RAVINE! GET TO HIGH GROUND!

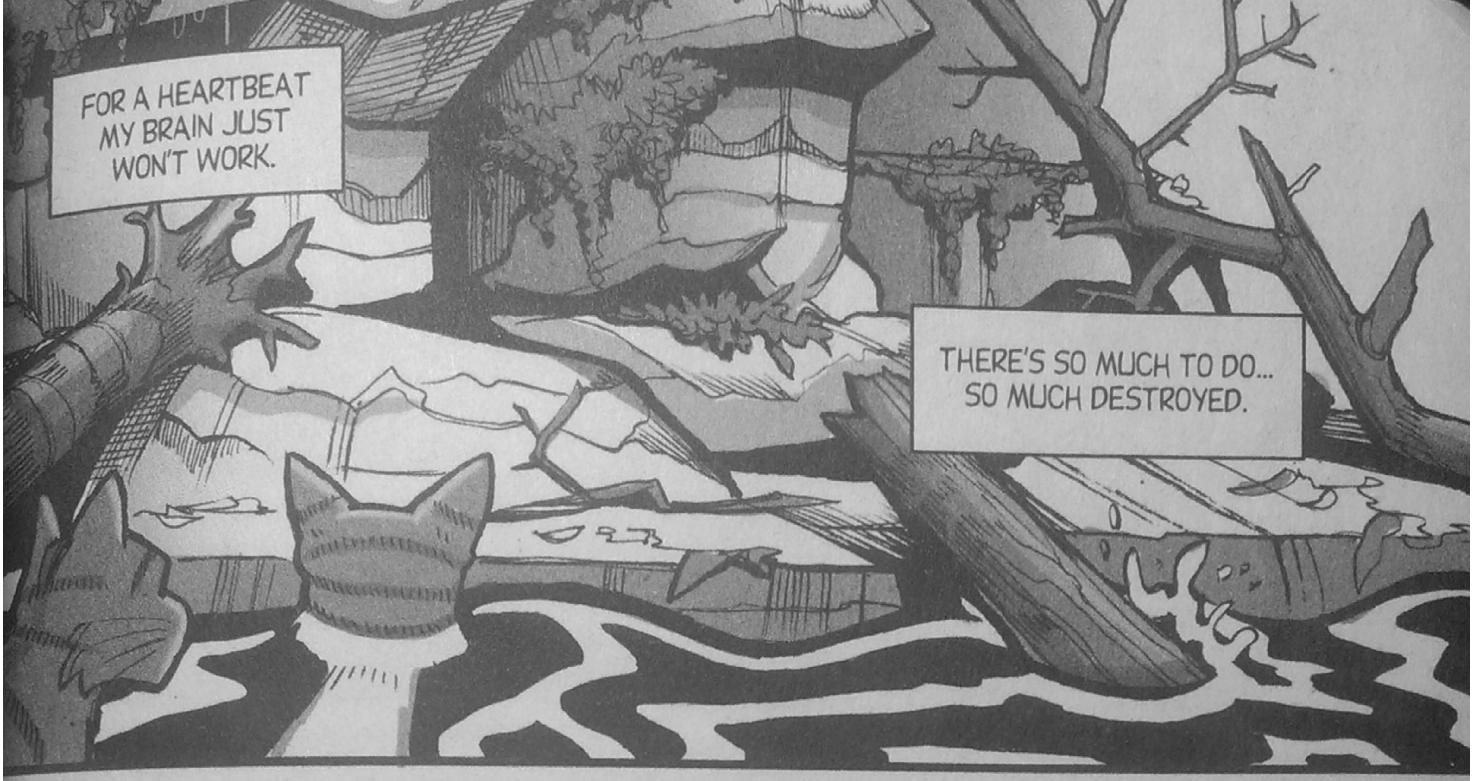
RUN AS FAST AS YOU CAN!
GO!
KEEP GOING... KEEP GOING...
UNHHH...
MEEEEEEP! MEEEEEEEEP!


HOLD ON!
EVERYONE GRAB ON TO THE ROCKS!
IT TAKES A LONG TIME. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG. I KNOW IT FEELS LIKE...A SEASON OR TWO...
MEEEEEEP! MEEEEEEEEP!
...BUT FINALLY, FINALLY THE FLOODWATERS DIE DOWN, AND THE RAIN STOPS.
...IS IT OVER?
I THINK WE MIGHT NEED SOME HELP GETTING DOWN FROM HERE.

CATS, DAZED AND BEDRAGGLED, MAKE THEIR WAY BACK INTO WHAT'S LEFT OF OUR CAMP.
I DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE THE FOREST BELOW THE GORGE NOW.
SO MANY TREES ARE JUST...GONE.
CAN YOU--WOULD YOU MIND LOOKING AFTER THE KITS FOR A BIT?
I NEED TO FIND OUT HOW BAD THINGS ARE.
OF COURSE.
WE'LL BE RIGHT HERE.
SKYCLAN!
I NEED ALL CATS ACCOUNTED FOR! IS ANYONE HURT?

NOTHING SERIOUS SO FAR, LEAFSTAR!
I'M BEGINNING TO THINK WE'VE GOTTEN OFF EASY, AS FAR AS PERSONAL DAMAGE GOES.
THOUGH I REALLY WISH ALL MY HERBS AND SUPPLIES HADN'T JUST BEEN WASHED AWAY!
I GUESS I SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO GET TOO OPTIMISTIC.
OH, NO... NO...NOOO...
IT'S LICHENFUR!
SHE'S DEAD!
85


LICHENFUR...
NO...
KNOWN HER MY WHOLE LIFE...
...REMEMBER HOW SHE SAVED LEAFSTAR'S KITS?
LOST A HERO TODAY...
LEAFSTAR...?
COULD WE... WOULD IT BE ALL RIGHT IF WE SIT WITH HER?
FOR THE REST OF THE NIGHT, I MEAN...LIKE WE DID WITH RAINFUR?
OR...OR, I MEAN, I KNOW THE DENS ARE WRECKED...
DO YOU WANT US TO GET STARTED PUTTING THEM BACK TOGETHER INSTEAD?


FOR A HEARTBEAT MY BRAIN JUST WON'T WORK.
THERE'S SO MUCH TO DO... SO MUCH DESTROYED.

NO...NO.
THE CAMP CAN WAIT FOR A WHILE.

TONIGHT WE'LL SIT VIGIL FOR OUR LOST CLANMATE.

STARCLAN, WHY DID YOU LET THIS STORM HAPPEN?
WHY CAN'T YOU LET SKYCLAN LIVE HERE IN PEACE?
DON'T WORRY. WE'LL REBUILD THE DENS.
SKYCLAN WILL SURVIVE.

TO BE CONCLUDED